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Muffled violations: a practice-based exploration of artworks embedded  
with the traumatic memory of acquaintance rape

By

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## ABSTRACT

**Title of mini-dissertation:** Muffled violations: a practice-based exploration of artworks embedded with the traumatic memory of acquaintance rape

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**Degree:** MA(Fine Arts)

**BKS 859:** Creative production and mini-dissertation

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*Muffled violations* is an artistic exploration of the trauma endured by a victim<sup>1</sup> of acquaintance rape. Through qualitative and practice-based approaches, this study argues that viewers may encounter affects of sexual violation and respond empathetically with the artist-researcher through an assemblage of found objects and video works in an exhibition. The artworks offer an account of rape more attuned to the psychological impact experienced by victims, rather than that of reports on sexual brutality found in journalistic media. This study also reviews a selection of contemporary works made by female artists, to investigate how art implicitly, through its particular communicative strengths can be regarded as an affective means through which representations and perceptions of sexual violence can be reconfigured. Through the making of art, this study aims to bring attention to alternative narratives of rape that often go undocumented and to position these voices within a South African context of pervasive sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV)<sup>2</sup>.

### KEY TERMS

South African art, practice-based inquiry, rape theory, trauma, affect theory, memory, empathy, found object, assemblage

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<sup>1</sup> The victim mentioned in this study, is also the artist-researcher thereof. Thus, the referral 'artist' will be used interchangeably with that of victim at times.

<sup>2</sup> SGBV is defined as any form of violation committed against a person, as a result of societal norms, gender roles and behavioural expectations formed within a community (SpeakOutUp 2020:[sp]).

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Date: 14 June 2024

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What I hope to be perceived and accepted as a critical form of thinking is the way I speak into my practice of my experience of acquaintance rape, with slang, vulgarities and a dirty sense of humour acquired from being friends with a few *ouens* or *brahs van my*<sup>3</sup> from Promosa- the 'Coloured hood' I was raised in, located in Potchefstroom. In its honest crudeness, much like the text found written in a private diary, the mini-dissertation and the creative component accompanying the research may read as self-reflexive. As such, the dissertation is written in first person. It may even be on the gist of seeming confessional, when in truth it is a combination of this; a poetic exploration of sexual trauma through sculptural assemblages, video works and the handling of used materials based in creative practice, the contextualisation of theory and an exhibition of works.

Sincerely, Caz.

Please take note that the research and body of work discussed in this paper deal with issues sexual assault and rape in-depth. Please take caution upon reading, due to trigger warnings.

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<sup>3</sup> Directly translated this phrase means; close male friends of mine.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Personal journal entry: Saturday, 31 August 2022

Ma, I 've missed you terribly throughout this because, I know you would have just held me until I stopped crying. I've felt your presence throughout it all though and in those times, this felt light. This is my way of saying thank you and that I have missed you. I knew you had my back when Johan Thom called with this opportunity and that you pulled the grandest stunt allowing me to work under the guidance of Nicola Grobler, an artist and critical thinker I've admired and always wanted to work with. To top it off, my colleagues in the Fine Arts at the University of Pretoria; Magdel van Rooyen, Avi Sooful, Teboho Lebakeng and Natalie Fossey, have all made my stay feel somewhat like a second home for which I am so grateful. I could not have done it without their continual support, they were all my fighters. I have felt taken care of here at the School of the Arts and much of it due to Professor Lize Kriel as well, who believed in my potential just as much as my colleagues have.

I don't know why I took so long to seek out therapy, in nearly ignoring to do so, this study -along with myself almost crumbled. It is important to seek out counselling after any traumatic event, this is a life lesson I will not be leaving behind moving forward in my practice. I could have spared Ma Nteo, Oneo and Motheo who took me in during lockdown and often nursed me out of depression the concern. To Nolo who reminded me that I was not alone and always took my side, to Adeline who reassured me that my anxiety was validated, to Khumo who spoke tenderness into a hard situation, to Nkosazana who kept me grounded and Noma who held me accountable, thank you. The love I have for these women goes beyond words, I dearly appreciate them. To my family, especially my aunts and a special mention to uncle Martin, my gratitude first comes as an apology for being standoffish over the last three years. I was not easy to deal with and none of you deserved receiving the worst end of me. Lastly, my deepest thanks goes to Tamz, my little sister. You more than anyone else have been burdened and left hurt by my actions. When I had been unable to emotionally process the trauma, you could have left me, but you never did. Instead, you forgave me for it all. I cannot think of how to repay you. Just know, I love you. Ma, *dankie*. You've honoured me by having them embrace me so. To each of you, I am so grateful.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of study

*Muffled violations* is an artistic exploration in which a personal memory of experiencing acquaintance rape and its subsequent trauma is evoked through an exhibition of found objects, sculptural assemblages and video works. Through a qualitative, phenomenological and practice-based approach, this study argues that viewers may empathetically respond to affects of sexual violation when encountering the body of works. The artworks offer an account of rape more attuned to the psychological impact experienced by victims, rather than a focus on sexual brutality conventionally found in journalistic media. The study aims to address the impact of rape on a victim through the aesthetic transformation of found objects such as, hollow steel chairs from a dining room set, a double-sized mattress and used materials such as, worn pantyhose and slept-in bedsheets among others. This practice-based inquiry aims to bring attention to alternative narratives of rape that often go undocumented and to position these voices within a South African context of pervasive sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).

Assistant professor in the department of media and communications at the London School of Economics, Simidele Dosekun (2013:517) considers SGBV a national crisis in South Africa. Considering this, this study situates rape discourse within a feminist viewpoint from the seminal work of South African author, gender activist and scholar in literature and cultural studies, Pumla Dineo Gqola (2007, 2015). This study will expand on rape culture and myths taken from the contributions of theorists; Martha Burt and Rochelle Albin (1981), Burt (1991), Kimberly Lonsway and Louise Fitzgerald (1994), and Carrie Rentschler (2014) to explore how public perception of rape is formed. Concepts pertaining to sexual trauma are explored through the theoretical contributions of Lynda Holmstrom and Ann Burgess (1975), Lauren Moss (2011), Stephanie Bonnes (2013), Helen Frost (2018) and Yxta Maya Murray (2012). Considerable focus is placed on the representation of rape in art practice, these are drawn from the academic works of Diane Wolfthal (1993, 1999) and Susan Brownmiller (1975). This study also includes reviews of a selection of contemporary works made by female artists, to investigate how art implicitly, through its particular communicative strengths, can be regarded as an affective means through which representations and perceptions of sexual violence can be reconfigured.

Scholars in practice-based research such as Linda Candy and Ernst Edmonds (2018:67) argues that the ambiguous and suggestive workings inherent in art can provide the means through which difficult subject matter such as, a personal memory of sexual trauma can be made accessible to viewers. In this study I also addresses the issue of remembering the rape, particularly how flashbacks became merged with erotic dreams and that my experience of rape did not fit within what I perceived rape to be, which had been 'violent'. My experience of rape felt physically pleasurable and it left no visible scar as proof of assault. Therefore, attention is given to Bessel van der Kolk and Rita Fidler's (1995) theories on the process of dissociation and the fragmentary nature of traumatic memory. This study puts forward that the creative processes involved in the production of works for *Muffled Violations* (2022) played a significant role in helping me recall suppressed memories of rape, affording me the opportunity to process sexual trauma and find a sense of healing through cathartic modes of handling materials.

This exhibition of work aims to invoke an uncanny sense of the feeling of sexual violation within viewers, by means of affect framed within Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1945) and John Bannan's (1956) conception of phenomenology. Theorists on affect theory considered in this study are Simon O'Sullivan (2001), Clare Hemmings (2005), Ben Anderson (2005, 2016) and Kate Stanley (2017), who describe the intense quality inherent in life and art that challenges the means of signification and representation. Thus, arguing that viewers may access affects of sexual trauma from artworks through an embodied encounter of the exhibition, that is based on Jill Bennett's (2005) identification of an empathetic mode of viewing for work invested in traumatic experiences.

This study is in part a response to the rape and murder of Uyinene Mrwetyana. Journalist for the New Yorker, Rosa Lyster (2019:[sp]) remarks in her article that Mrwetyana's death inspired protest movements under the hashtag "*AmINext?*". This question encompassed the sense that in South Africa, rape seemed inescapable and that nowhere was safe. News reporter for City Press, Mandisa Nyathi (2020:[sp]), wrote that a public sense of hopelessness was felt towards the state's ability to protect women against SGBV. These articles and others often focused on the violent sexual attack and the state of victims' bodies when found, thus highlighting the gruesome nature of her assault. In Mrwetyana's case, as reported by Unathi Nkanjeni (2019:[sp]) in Times Live, the rapist was reported to have strangled and raped her twice before bludgeoning her with a two-kilogram weight aimed at her head. It is also documented that the perpetrator then proceeded to wrap Mrwetyana's body, store it overnight in the post office

safe to later set alight and discard in an open field in Lingelethu West of Khayelitsha (Nkanjeni 2019:[sp]).

In the context of my own violation that same year, I concur that the presentation of sexually brutal instances in South African journalistic media oversimplifies the victim's lived account of rape and projects an inaccurate societal perception of the rape act. Media reports often prioritise violent incidences of SGBV such as infant or elderly rape, gang, and corrective rape as well as acts of mutilation and murder, and focus on the bodily condition of victims. Author Helen Frost (2018:10) notes that in journalistic media, victims often appear abused, without a sense of agency and are reduced to their wounded or deceased bodies. According to Gqola (2015:8), these media reports may give the impression that other forms of rape are not as serious and may even seem 'reasonable'. Thus, occurrences such as non-violent acquaintance rape are not considered significant enough for media reportage. Counselling psychologist, Lauren Moss (2011:6), argues for the documentation of under-represented rape narratives to counteract perceptions set out in media reports. This practice-based study aims to contribute to these alternative narratives.

In cases such as Mrwetyana's, where rapists are labelled predatory strangers, rape is often cast as an erratic event of horror. Helen Frost (2018:8) argues that it causes us to overlook rape as commonplace. According to authors Johan Burger, Chandré Gould and Garreth Newham (2010:9), statistics show that rape is three times more likely to be committed by those we know and not by strangers. Their study found that perceptions formed on the basis of such media representations seem to delineate victims and perpetrators into certain roles. One misconception noted by Nicolas Groth (in Goode 1996:289), is that rapists suffer from a psychological dysfunction<sup>4</sup>. Moss (2011:1) refutes this by stating that perpetrators claim to have a mental dysfunction to excuse and justify their supposed inability to control their sexual impulses. In light of the reality that rapists are usually known to their victims, one may assume that culprits often function normally within society and are capable of choosing to rape.

Professor of political sciences, gender and sexuality studies at the University of Kansas, Hannah Britton (2006:146), mentions that rape is presumed to be a consequence of violence rooted in South Africa's colonial and apartheid past that negatively impacts women<sup>5</sup>. According to the

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<sup>4</sup> Mrwetyana's rapist, Luyando Botha, supposedly suffered from mental illness (Lyster 2019:[sp]).

<sup>5</sup> However, not just restricted to women, SGBV also impacts children of any gender, men who do not conform to heteronormative standards, queer and gender non-conforming individuals.

National Criminal Law (Sexual and other Related Matters) Amendment Act (2007:sec68.20), rape is an unlawful act committed with intentions to penetrate or elicit arousal without the consent of an individual. What this definition in law fails to address is how rape leaves victims psychologically scarred. Enrich Goode (1996:286) further differentiates forms of rape by the use or lack of physical coercion, substances used to incapacitate victims and the victim's relation to the perpetrator. This study restricts the scope of rape categories to focus on a subjective experience of acquaintance rape<sup>6</sup>. I knew my rapist and we shared a romantic interest in each other that had not evolved to an intimate stage before the rape. Additionally, I suspect that I had been drugged, which is a common occurrence among date rape scenarios (Goode 1996:287). There had been no evidence of struggle or violation left on my body such as bruising, tearing or stains of blood. The violation evinced itself though an off-putting odour which faded after bathing and through flashbacks appearing as though they were from an erotic dream that left physical sensations of pleasure within my body and not those of pain.

From the statement above, it should be noted that I felt unconvinced about having experienced a sexual violation. It is noted by theorist, Carrie Rentschler (2014: 167) that our perception of rape is culturally formed through a specific set of values and attitudes that are upheld and through behaviours that are socially endorsed. Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1994: 152) mentions that it is a misconception that rape looks or happens in certain ways and that these misconceptions are constructed from rape myths. Rape myths are stereotypical (often false) ideas about rape, victims and perpetrators that are held within a society. For example, it seems expected for victims to prove their inculpability in the act of rape, by showing they had put up a fight trying to resist their offender. Whereas, in this instance of date rape it did not unfold through a series of violent events, instead it felt like twisted eroticism and left me doubtful of whether I participated in my own violation. Burt (1991:27) notes that rape myths tend to trivialise the severity of sexual accounts and is often used to justify male sexual aggression towards women.

Rape theorists, Brownmiller (1975: 41) and Gqola (2007:115) come to the assertion that rape is used as a gendered and communicative tool by the patriarch to control, subdue and punish those who deviate from social convention, particularly women. Another example of a rape myth that is refuted by Kate Wood, Helen Lambert, and Rachel Jewkes (2007:284) asserts that a

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<sup>6</sup> The artist acknowledges that her experience falls within a collective of many others. However unique each of our experience are, what is shared is that one suffered and has been made to endure the burden of trauma caused by SGBV.

victim's style of dress may be mistaken for a signal of sexual availability and that often attire is used to morally implicate victims of being at fault. From my recollection, the rapist undressed me while unconscious and then dressed me afterwards<sup>7</sup>. Through practice-based inquiry, this study seeks out creative modes to transform and challenge the social language into which gendered norms are constructed and that often sanction violent masculinities in patriarchal societies such as South Africa.

This study looks to find implicit ways of communicating and sharing the complex nature of the experience of rape and its subsequent trauma. Through making art and the transcribing of this mini-dissertation, the research incites a form of quiet activism that expands on the convention of official police reporting. Based on a personal and unfortunate encounter with nurses from a local health service provider and an inspector from the South African Police Services (SAPS) in Potchefstroom, I experienced re-traumatisation, from which a mistrust and lack of faith in the South African government to exact justice formed<sup>8</sup>. What this study argues is that through creative research, victims of rape are free to express their personal experience of sexual trauma and how rape impacted their lives.

This study argues that through the poetic and ambiguous registers inherent in the creative process, an allowance for personal interpretation is permitted in the re-scripting of the lived experience of rape and trauma. The creative works of other female artists reviewed in this study as well as the body of works created for the exhibition, *Muffled Violations* are explored for their ability to call out perpetrators of SGBV in a manner that is not defamatory<sup>9</sup>, but instead requires of them to acknowledge and account for what they have done. The study allows the audience to be affected and gives voice to the personal trauma suffered by the victim. This study brings the suffering that occurs behind closed doors into public view through artistic exploration.

## 1.2 Research questions

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<sup>7</sup> “*Maar, jy dra nie panties nie-* I laugh often, it’s the one night I decided not to wear undies. It’s as if he would use that against me as proof that I consented. What good girl doesn’t wear panties? Case, closed.” (Artist entry, 7 July 2019).

<sup>8</sup> “They threatened not to help me unless I gave up my rapist’s name first. The nurses (female) said that many girls come to the clinic and lie about being raped, because they want to get free morning after pills. The inspector (female as well), insisted that they couldn’t waste a rape kit and risk the evidence expiring without a confession of the rapist’s name”, (Personal journal entry, 9 July 2019).

<sup>9</sup> As commonly found on the targeted protest posters of the *#MenareTrash* movement.

*Muffled violations* is a practice-based study of the artist's lived account and memory of acquaintance rape and its trauma, through an assemblage of found objects and video works in an exhibition. This study puts forward that art can be used as a powerful tool to address and redefine how we perceive and represent sexual violence. The exhibition is not a graphic performance of rape, instead viewers are invited to experience the affects of sexual trauma embedded within the artworks. The body of work aims to conjure an empathetic sensibility within viewers for the trauma endured by a victim of date rape. This study argues that the creative transformation of objects such as a double-sized bed (reminiscent of the site of sexual trauma) may ascribe new meaning to the experience of sexual violation for the victim and that creative methods can elicit a process of recovery or catharsis for the victim.

The artist substituted her own body and that of the rapist's with found objects to avoid any stereotypical assumptions made about victim and perpetrator roles pertaining to race. Gqola (2015:21) notes that there is a unique racial aspect to rape myths in the South African context that reveal the reinforcement of racism in the construction of black peril or rather, '*swart gevaar*' from our country's history. Furthermore, Gqola (2015:21) adds that black peril perpetuated the idea of black men as rapists of white women. According to Gqola (2015:4) this very same white supremacist conception, inferring that 'only black men rape' formed the stereotype that portrayed black women as hypersexual and permissible to rape. Furthermore, these misconceptions acquitted white males from suspicion, did not consider that men rape other men, overlooked that black men rape black women and that women themselves could be rapists. Sexual and gender-based violence is something that affects us all and should not be demarcated racially. As such, the artworks provide a suggestion of bodies through an arrangement of sculptural forms and the integration of corporeal traces of human use of intimate objects such as pillows with stains and a chair with a bent foot. The selection of found objects do not hold any form of identification to a particular individual, yet they may be indicative of gender. For example, the use of navy-coloured bedsheets implies that they belong to a man, as was particular to the artist's experience.

The exhibition acts as a visual interpretation of a victim's attempt at calling out their rapist through the making of sculptural assemblages from found objects<sup>10</sup>. Influenced by activist art,

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<sup>10</sup> The artist cannot use these works as official evidence in seeking out justice. The found objects are not the exact ones from the scene of the crime and creative transformation allows for a degree of exaggeration of the 'truth'. In this there is a futility, justice will not be served through such means. If the

this exhibition provides a voice for the artist, as she addresses her rapist through the works. These sculptural assemblages ask for a sense of accountability from viewers and may be perceived as a quiet form of protest captured as a site of memory of sexual trauma. The title, *'Muffled violations'* is evocative of the activity of unconsented sex, in acquaintance rape. It speaks to the artist's memories of the account, such as how the rapist pressed his hand over her mouth in an attempt to silence her outcry, which ruptured from her mouth as moans instead of screams. Still, these moans alerted the rapist to the potential of being caught in the act, and his attempt to obstruct sound became a covering up of a crime. This body of work has aimed to surface the victim's inner conflicts, complexity and contradictions that are uniquely particular to a date rape scenario. The artist also took influence from crude, and at times, dark humoured or graphically erotic utterances written in her journal. These journal entries<sup>11</sup> were resolved into titles and synopsis for the artworks.

This study speaks of what can be said of the victim who lived after rape and of the rape encounter that was not physically violent, but more psychologically perplexing. Bennett (2005:3) claims that trauma exceeds linguistic description and conventional modes of representation; trauma is not easily facilitated with images of a battered face. Michal Bat and Orna Megides (2016:2) claim that trauma is a stressful event that overwhelms one's ability to cope and disrupts one's sense of wellbeing. Van der Kolk and Fisler (1995:506) considers it an intrusion on the consciousness that makes it difficult to integrate the memory. Holmstrom and Burgess (1975: 1289) claim this may lead to the development of somatic and complex behavioural changes, such as post-traumatic stress disorder<sup>12</sup>.

This study engages with the artist's personal memory of a traumatic sexual encounter. The artist is aware that memory is fallible, that flashbacks from being raped have made her register the experience differently. The study will explore van der Kolk and Fisler's (1995) theory of the process of dissociation and the fragmentary nature of traumatic memories. Cara Laney and Elizabeth Loftus (2005:826) and van der Kolk and Fisler (1995:5) claim that traumatic events are encoded differently than ordinary events, which lose clarity and become distorted overtime. They add that traumatic events may be remembered with an extreme intensity or resist

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artist wishes to do so, official reporting routes should be initiated with the South African Police Service (SAPS).

<sup>11</sup> These journal entries take the form of private conversations shared between the artist and her rapist, colloquial date/rape culture phrases geographically unique to where the artist is from and (but not limited to) written moments of uncensored venting as well.

<sup>12</sup> Will be abbreviated as PTSD throughout from here.



integration into one's memory (van der Kolk & Fislser 1995:6). The artist notes that recalling the rape came with its own set of difficulties, yet found that studio-based production and the creative altering of found objects into art, has elicited a sense of recall from which to work.

Van der Kolk and Fislser (1995:6) state that when aspects of an experience are not fully integrated, they sit there as "isolated fragments, sensory perceptions, affective states or behavioural re-enactments" in a person's memory. Through practice-based exploration the artist has visually interpreted how memories of the rape event merged into something akin to an erotic dream, which became the vehicle through which the act of rape was confirmed and became laden with ideas of shame. This exhibition invites viewers to experience what Simon O'Sullivan (2001: 125) defines as affect, "moments of intensity [registered] in and on the body at a level of matter". Viewers may experience the affects of sexually traumatic memories embedded within materials and found objects, rather than a graphic performance of the rape event.

This studio-based practice was video recorded, photographed and documented in a catalogue. These chosen objects and materials became actors within the making process, which provoked vivid recalls of the violation for the artist. Through the aesthetic changing of these items, new meaning was given to her experience of sexual trauma. This study argues that art practice allows the victim the poetic license to call out her perpetrator through an exhibition of works with shrewd titling and descriptions, so that recovery or catharsis becomes possible.

The following research questions were identified and are addressed in the chapters that proceed:

- i. What are the implicit measures available to artists to elicit affect and empathy in their creative practice?
- ii. This study asks how an exhibition of found objects and assemblage artworks may evoke the artist's lived account and memory of acquaintance rape and its subsequent trauma, for the viewer.
- iii. How may the creative process be understood as a simultaneous process of recovery and/or catharsis in relation to sexual trauma.

### 1.3 Aims and objectives

In the exhibition viewers may have experienced the affects emerging from an assemblage of duvets, used chairs and worn stockings, embedded with traumatic memories from the artist's lived experience and memory of acquaintance rape. The aim of the exhibition was to encourage viewers to make visceral interpretations of the artist's process of recovery and catharsis from sexual violation. The exhibition was aimed at unsettling viewers through the creative transformation and presentation of artworks, and at working against media representations that oversimplify the SGBV encounter, by focusing on brutality and at times negating or making other forms of sexual violence insignificant.

The exhibition publicised an unrepresented account of rape, in the form of artworks that poetically evinces the impact of rape on a victim. The exhibition set out to counter rape myths about victim and perpetrator roles, while avoiding racial stereotypes specific to the South African context by not representing bodies. Reference to the banal and pervasive nature of rape were made through a selection of items taken from the familiar, private and intimate space of a bedroom such as; a pair of used pillows, mattress springs or bed foets among others. The artist aimed to address the national SGBV crisis by means of ambiguity in the work, their written description and titling, to make critical statements<sup>13</sup> that could potentially offer solace for victims of SGBV.

The objects used (because they are so familiar to viewers as well) referenced questions posed during protests like; *#AmInext?* *#WhereAmIsafe?*, to accentuate the idea that SGBV may happen anywhere and most often at the hands of those you know. Viewers are not witnesses to a graphic restaging of the rape event. The artist does not intend to re-traumatise viewers or reduce her experience to mere spectacle. Instead, viewers could experience visible traces of psychological scarring meant to be 'felt' through the handling of materials during the creative process and could experience a conjuring of sexual trauma by means of their display.

#### 1.4 Theoretical framework

This study situates rape discourse within a feminist viewpoint with consideration given to representation and rape myths. Due to this study's interpretive research approach, concepts pertaining to traumatic memory and affect will be positioned within a phenomenological framework. According to Merleau-Ponty and Bannan (1956:59), phenomenology attempts to

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<sup>13</sup> The artist acknowledges that SGBV affects the lives of many and that she cannot speak on behalf of all those affected.

describe human experiences from subjective accounts of the world as lived. This study proposes that practice-based exploration can give an acquaintance rape victim the means to communicate memories of their lived experiences and the psychological impacts of sexual trauma. Danuta Wojnar and Kristen Swanson (2007:174) mention that people are uniquely situated within broader social, political and cultural contexts that help them make sense of the world. As such, viewers may empathetically respond to works of art through their practical familiarity to the world (Wojnar & Swanson 2007:175). This would imply that viewers may experience these visual retellings and come to form meaning of these works through self-interpretative modes.

### 1.5 Research methodology

This study followed a qualitative research methodology, which Kirsti Malterud (2016:122) mentions is situated within an interpretative paradigm. Gareth Morgan and Linda Smircich (1980:497) note of qualitative inquiries that knowledge of human behaviour as it is affected by the social world is brought into understanding through non-linear processes. Malterud (2016:121) notes that it is different from positivist research paradigms situated in the natural sciences, in that no hypothesis needs to be established in the collection of data for a result of measurable outcomes. Unlike the quantitative approach, which seeks out numerically verifiable knowledge, the qualitative approach leaves room for ambiguous findings and personal interpretation that are best suited for artistic explorations.

This study followed a practice-based research approach, wherein art practice according to Graeme Sullivan (2010:15), is qualified as a form of research inquiry. As such, an exhibition of artworks may form the main contribution to knowledge. Candy and Edmonds (2018:64) adds that the art making process is an important method that informs critical inquiry. This study made use of filmed, photographed and written observations of studio-based practice and creative outcomes, where the creative transformations of the bed and hosiery were contextualised, and critically reflected on for new meaning which informed the art making process. For Michael Biggs (quoted in Candy & Edmonds 2010: 6) a textual description is needed alongside the artworks, alone they cannot communicate the knowledge entrenched within them. Thus, the exhibition of works is accompanied by a textual analysis of the processes that occurred during the creation of artwork (Candy 2006:9), a contextualisation of theory and an analysis of selected visual sources in the form of a written mini-dissertation, descriptive

artwork statements and a visual documentation of studio practice and artworks in a printed catalogue.

## 1.6 Literature review

This study is largely informed by Gqola's seminal work, *Rape a South African nightmare* (2015) but also considers rape discourse through other theorists' work; Brownmiller in her book, *'Against our will: Men, women and rape'* (1975), asserts that in a dominantly patriarchal society, rape is not driven by lust, instead it shows a power imbalance. Brownmiller (1975:41) insists that rapists rape to control and dominate. Randy Thornhill and Craig Palmer (2000:9) contradict Brownmiller, framing rape as an evolutionary phenomenon, a by-product of our biology in the reproductive strategy. They argue through a sociobiological and Darwinian lens that when men are unsuccessful in obtaining sexual access to women by means of consent, aggression is often used (Thornhill & Palmer 2000:33). Camille Paglia reiterates this idea, describing rape as a ritual enactment of natural aggression latent in sexual behaviour for mating (Paglia 1995:34).

Burt and Albin (1981), Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1994) discuss rape through the idea of myths. They note that stereotypical, often false beliefs shape how rape is perceived among a community (Lonsway & Fitzgerald 1994:134), which affects the probability of conviction (Burt & Albin 1981: 214). Bonnes (2013) examines rape coverage in *Grocott's Mail*, a South African newspaper. By identifying jargon that appear in public text or speech she argues that particular representations of victims and perpetrators are fixed on gender, class, age, and race (Bonnes 2013:211). Jewkes and others (2009) and Sikweyiya, Jewkes and Morrell (2007:50) positions rape to men's health (HIV) in South Africa.

Murray (2012:1613) writes on the use of rape trauma syndrome evidence in court trials to explain why rape victims display counterintuitive behaviour, such as late reporting, denial of rape occurrence or even returning to the crime scene. Murray (2012:1641) argues from a feminist perspective, using Tracey Emin's work, *My Bed*, 1998 to challenge oversimplified testimonies of victims told by prosecutors in court. Moss (2011:3) provides phenomenological insight on young South African women who have experienced acquaintance rape and its subsequent trauma. Christopher Stones and Moss (2013:210) mention that the very nature of the rape is invasive and leaves the victim with a complex set of behavioural, emotional, and cognitive reactions.

Pertaining to affect theory, O'Sullivan (2001:126) claims that affect describe the '*molecular*' (the intense quality inherent in life and art) that goes deeper, beyond and even parallel to signification to the '*molar*'. Hemmings (2005:549) considers affect to be the residue that constitutes the fabric of being that is not socially constructed. Hemmings (2005:459) further references John Bruns (2000) who suggests that affect foregrounds the unexpected and is that thing which throws us off guard. Ben Anderson (2005:649) notes that "it is our capacity to affect and be affected"; affects are not explicitly seen but are experienced as bodily sensations waiting for reactivation. According to Hemmings (2005:551) they could be perceived as states of being instead of emotional responses to events or experiences. Kate Stanley (2017:98) notes from William James' work that emotion is only indicative of physical change, not the cause thereof, it is the feeling of one's state of being. In O'Sullivan (2001:129) affects are referred to as an '*apersonal*' thing that responds and resonates with matter around us, they are *transhuman*. According to Silvan Tomkins (1963) quoted in Hemmings (2005:551), affect places an individual in a circuit of feelings and responses that may be transferred onto objects or experiences. Accordingly, the artist could embed a mattress with affects of traumatic memories.

### 1.7 Review of visual texts

A selection of contemporary artworks was explored to support this study's arguments, in that they are concerned with narratives of violence and suffering specific to sexual trauma. The artworks of the following artists were discussed and juxtaposed along Wolfthal's (1993, 1999) studies of rape imagery in Western art. The work of South African artist Nandipha Mntambo entitled, *The rape of Europa*, 2005 (Figure 2) is investigated through the appraisal of authors Nadia Sanger (2013:63), Gina van Zyl de Oliveira (2013:35) and Ruth Lipschitz (2012:547), for how Mntambo addresses narratives of historical violence, gender and racial issues of power in the construction of a post-colonial identity in South Africa. Susan Ecclestone (2012:71) interviewed Mntambo on her personal reflection on the work and how the artist looks to find ways for black women to represent themselves. The study draws a comparison between Mntambo's work and Wolfthal's identification of heroic rape imagery.

Cuban born artist Ana Mendieta's *Untitled rape scene*, 1973 (Figure 3) is explored through contributions of Emily Newman (2014:3), who describes the work as a graphic restaging of a sexual crime. Mendieta's work is discussed alongside Wolfthal's description of explicit rape. In the print produced by South African artist, Laura Windvogel (commonly referred to as Lady

Skollie) titled, *#Sorry not sorry*, 2016 (Figure 4), Warren Maroon (2016: [sp]) reviews Skollie's recreation of an apology letter released by South African musician, Simiso Zwane. Grace Banks (2017: [sp]) explores the work for the way in which Skollie uses text to call out the local rapper in his lack of admission to sexual assault charges. The study makes a comparative analysis between Skollie's work and justice rape, which places the assailant at the centre of the rape account.

South African artist, Gabrielle Goliath's five-channel video installation entitled *Personal Accounts*, 2014 (Figure 5) is observed for the way in which traumatic recall from victims of sexualised and gender-based violence are represented through sound. During an online discussion hosted on YouTube by Victoria Collis-Buthelezi (2022), the work was described as an evocation of the perpetual memory and endured trauma for survivors of SGBV, through the abstraction of their voices. Goliath's concern with the haptic sounds of the breaths and sighs in-between speech accentuates the psychological impact of trauma endured by survivors and is discussed in this study as victim accounts.

This study also investigates the contemporary work of the following artists for their employment of the found object in their creative practice, specifically with regards to how these works evoke the experience of trauma. Through the arguments of Michael Kelly (2012:129), Bennett (2005:51) and curator, Mary Schneider-Enrique (2018: [sp]), the work *Unland: the orphan's tunic*, 1997 (Figure 15) by Columbian-born artist Doris Salcedo, is observed for the way that trauma is conjured by means of found objects to give an account of traumatic memory. This study investigates the way in which Salcedo juxtaposes objects from the most intimate and private spaces of the home and exhibits them in uncanny ways to speak to ideas of suffering, loss and a sense of woundedness.

In his master dissertation, Lionel Bawden (2014: 26) explores the work of American artist, Emma Sulkowicz, for her experience and interpretation of rape in *Mattress performance (Carry That Weight)*, 2016. Bawden's (2014:24) study sheds light on the activist modality employed by Sulkowicz to speak up against sexual violence. In an online discussion hosted by curator, Susan May (2021:[sp]) the works of South African artist, Bronwyn Katz, made of used mattress foam and wire are reviewed. Katz's own reflection on the work *Sand kombers*, 2016 (Figure 12) provides a perspective of the bed as a repository for memory and land. This study explores how Katz employs deconstructive processes in the transformation of beds into art.

## 1.8 Ethical considerations

As this study reflects the artist's subjective experience and memory of acquaintance rape, it will not involve other human participants, such as the accounts of other rape victims in the form of testimonies, questionnaires or surveys. The artist and her supervisor have discussed the negative influence that intense focus on her experience of rape trauma may have on her research and practice. As such, the artist has established regular and continuous sessions with a therapist to manage any negative impact on her mental health. Additionally, the artist has considered the impact of the work on the viewer. The artworks created are not graphic depictions of sexual violence, as the artist's aim is not to re-traumatise viewers who may have been subjected to SGBV. As indicated, this study seeks to provide a space for recognition, reflection and empathy to contribute towards existing, and often limiting, discourses on rape, trauma and art. The artworks were displayed in the University of Pretoria's student gallery for examination purposes and to reach a broader public.

## 1.9 Chapter outline

Chapter Two aims to shift focus away from representing victims of SGBV without a sense of agency. Herein, I work against oversimplifications of the victim's experience of rape by exploring the treatment with which sexual violence is imaged in art throughout time. As such, this chapter surveys Wolfthal's (1993, 1999) studies on Western representation of rape in art to draw a comparative analysis with the contemporary work of female artists, such as Mntambo, Ana Mendieta, Skollie and Goliath. An identification of heroic, explicit and justice rape imagery is discussed with the addition of victims' account to the category of rape representation in art. This chapter alerts readers to the implicit measures employed by artists in their work to address matters of gender-based violence and sexual trauma. The implicit measures explored in this paper use creative modalities such as photography, performance, text and video work to make viewers aware of the impact of SGBV.

Chapter Three places focus on how a body of sculptural assemblages made from found objects may evoke my lived experience and memory of acquaintance rape and its subsequent trauma for the viewer. This chapter argues that studio-based practice can become a means through which traumatic memories could be reclaimed and ascribed new meaning. In *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma and Contemporary Art* (2005) Bennett posits that artists can conjure a sense of

traumatic memory within the spectator through found objects. As such, the contemporary work of artists such as Salcedo, Sulkowicz and Katz are investigated, particularly for their use of objects taken from the intimate space of the home, with special consideration given to the use of beds in their art practice. In conjunction to these artists' works, the third chapter provides a reflection on my own process of making the bed series, in which the bed is framed as a site of sexual trauma.

The fourth chapter entitled Open Letters, demonstrates how the creative process may be understood as a simultaneous process of recovery and/or catharsis in relation to sexual trauma. Owing to the title of this chapter, I provide a self-reflexive account of my endurance of sexual trauma that is informed by studio practice and the intuitive handling of materials and objects. Focus is placed on the materialisation and creative interpretation of the experience of sexual trauma using found objects, assemblage and video as visual modalities. Within this chapter, readers encounter how the aesthetic transformation of a bed, hollow steel chairs taken from a dining room set and pantyhose elicits the recall of suppressed memory for me- a process that has become necessary in helping me understand what I have gone through and how it even aids in the selection of materials. The artworks herein speak of my thoughts on boundaries, consent, foul play and relationships through the analogy of playing a childhood street game called, *Mama-safe*. This chapter reveals how creative practice facilitates the process of healing and reclaiming of one's dignity by rescripting the narrative of rape into something beautiful, such as art.



## CHAPTER TWO

### THE REPRESENTATION OF RAPE IN ART

Personal journal entry: Sunday, 4 September 2019

I asked him what happened last night, he just said “we fucked”. Incapacitated on your bed you undressed me and had your way. I wish I had bled or that you left me sore, instead I just stunk of you. Instead of screaming “no”, I moaned. Please tell me I didn’t want that. We didn’t fuck, you raped me.

This chapter opens with a personal entry that demonstrates how difficult it is, even for victims, to reconcile the ways sexual violation embeds itself onto the body. Under the representational canon of media that we are exposed to, rape is often reduced to a violent act that marks victims with physical imprints of injury. To this, Gqola (2015: 29) notes that the visibly wounded body is perceived to offer proof of coercion. From this the assumption emerges that when rape is portrayed as violence, there is an insistence to prove that the victim was not culpable in the act. Revealed in my journal entry is the fear of having one’s experience disqualified from the classification of rape and the worry of being stigmatised because this experience of sexual violation does not coincide with how rape looks like in the media.

Thus, the second chapter puts forward that art may offer alternative readings of rape, which differs from visual records that condone the stereotypical beliefs and attitudes pertaining to SGBV, such as who perpetrates these crimes and falls victim to them or of when and how rape occurs. This chapter is dedicated to exploring how art practice can be used as a powerful tool to address and redefine how we perceive and represent sexual violence. A search for the implicit measures available to artists to elicit affect and empathy through their creative work are explored through Wolfthal’s (1993,1999) studies of Western rape representation in art made during the 12<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century. A comparative analysis is drawn between Wolfthal’s (1993:39) identification of ‘heroic, explicit and justice’ rape imagery and the contemporary artistic works of Mntambo, Mendieta and Skollie. This analysis of rape imagery and metaphorical rape narratives will focus on locating the creative strategies employed in art practice to represent rape. There is also an argument made for an addition to Wolfthal’s rape image categories, under the suggested title ‘victim accounts’. Goliath’s five-channel video piece, *Personal*

*Accounts*, 2014 is appraised under this category for how it prioritises a translation of the psychological impact of trauma endured by victims of SGBV.

## 2.1 The allure of rape

A position maintained by Wolfthal (1993:39), is that rape representations in artwork to document the socio-cultural and political views on sexual violence held by society at the time, is subject to change. This section begins with an observation of Wolfthal's study of heroic rape imagery, a category influenced by Brownmiller's (1975) assessment on paintings of ancient Greco-Roman gods and heroes that went on sexual conquests with unsuspecting women. An example of this is Saint Augustine's *Rape of the Sabines* (Figure 1), wherein Roman soldiers are shown luring Sabine women to a farce festival with the intention of claiming wives. According to Wolfthal (1999:381), these works do not display explicit scenes of sexual violence. In addition to this, without an inscription or a title accompanying the artwork, spectators can remain oblivious of the representation of rape within the work.



Figure 1: Saint Augustine *City of God*, *Rape of the Sabines*, 15<sup>th</sup> century  
Illumination, The Hague, Koninklijke Bibl, MS 72 A22, fol.33v  
(Wolfthal 1993: 40)

Heroic rape seemed encoded into a language of aesthetic adoration that averted attention away from the intrinsic horror of rape (Wolfthal 1999:383). Paintings in this canon seemed to eroticise and justify sexual advancements towards women through the deployment of painterly techniques, romanticised backdrops and characters adorned in elegant costumes (Wolfthal

1993:39). To this point, the painting *City of God, Rape of the Sabines* could mistakenly be considered a romantic scene because the Sabine women show no signs of having suffered a violent attack. As an example, Wolfthal (1993:39) points out their untorn gowns and the lack of resistance shown by the victims as their expressions remain controlled and even appear softened.

Depicted in the lower left corner of the painting, a couple appears framed by an arch of trees and moody lighting, a victim embraces her abductor with her face turned towards his and their arms intertwined as they wander off into the distance. According to Brownmiller (2005:313), in heroic rape imagery perpetrators are not depicted having suffered the consequences of their actions. Instead, sexual violation is presented as a just cause for marriage or something desirable (Wolfthal 1999:382). Presentations in the heroic tradition romanticised and hid the severity of sexual violation.

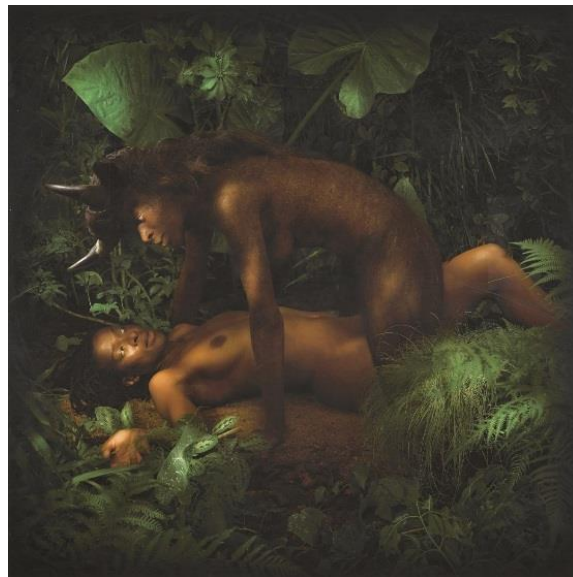


Figure 2: Nandipha Mntambo, *The Rape of Europa*, 2009  
Chromogenic print.  
112cm x 112cm.  
Zeitz Mocaa website (2020:[sp])

In her master dissertation van Zyl de Oliveira (2013:1) notes that Mntambo's photographic work, *Rape of Europa*, 2009 is inspired by the Greek mythological tale of the god Zeus who transforms into a white bull to embark on sexual pursuits of the Phoenician princess, Europa. The works' mythological origin and simulated painterly effects, inspired by the renaissance period that Mntambo employs, romanticise the scene. It could be said that the work resembles

Wolfthal's heroic rape imagery in that the interaction between supposed victim and rapist does not display a graphic scene of sexual violation. The figures are also placed against a backdrop of flora, just as in the heroic image in *City of God, Rape of the Sabines*. It is noted by Ecclestone (2012:71) in an interview with Mntambo, that the work is based on Pablo Picasso's etching, *Minitour kneeling over sleeping girl* of 1933.

Mntambo is quoted in the interview saying of Picasso's work that she had been intrigued by the apparent relationship between the sleeping woman 'beauty' and the minotaur, 'beast' (Ecclestone 2012:71). Mntambo observed within Picasso's etching that the sleeping girl seemed "aware of the advances being made by the monster-like human or half man/half bull, but that she shows no real fear or attempt to recoil" (Ecclestone 2012:72). Mntambo found it interesting how the invitation of something or someone threatening had not been a concern for this girl (Ecclestone 2012:72) and in turn, explored what the suggestion of this type of passive response could do in her photograph.

At the *Innovative Women: Ten Contemporary Black Women Artists* exhibition, curated by Bongzi Bengu and held in August 2009 at Constitutional Hill, former minister of Arts and Culture Lulama Xingwana is said to have condemned the inclusion of "naked bodies presumably involved in sexual acts" (Lipschitz 2012:551). Xingwana referred to Mntambo and Zanele Muholi's photographic works that according to her, portrayed same-sex relations. These works were labelled by the minister to be pornographic and obscene, with specific mention made to Mntambo's work as an image of self-rape (Lipschitz 2012:551). Xingwana further stated that the work misrepresented black women and trivialised the severity of sexual and gender-based violence in South Africa (Lipschitz 2012:552).

What the study finds particularly intriguing about *The Rape of Europa* is the embodiment of both the bull/rapist and victim as a naked black woman, Mntambo herself. Leana van de Merwe (2014:90) describes in her master dissertation that in Mntambo's photograph the victim appears complicit in her own violation due to simultaneously looking anxious and aroused. Often victims are accused of having caused their assault and if Mntambo's work were to be viewed as an image of 'self-rape' then one could speak to feelings of culpability, guilt, and shame that survivors are made to face as a result.

## 2.2 A report on the body

In order to identify the implicit measures available to artists in the representation of rape, it is key to note how artists may employ explicit strategies to provoke an empathetic response for victims of SGBV. Mendieta's *Untitled rape scene*, 1973 depicts rape as a savage act (Wolfthal 1993:40). According to Newman (2014:2) Mendieta responds to the brutal and highly publicised rape and murder of a nursing student, Sara Ann Otten, by another student from the University of Iowa. The artist invited fellow students to her apartment where they walked in on her stripped from the waist down, bent over a table with her hands tied-up.

In the photographed documentation of the two-hour performance (Newman 2014:4), Mendieta's legs are smeared in what appears to be blood. The scene is a dramatically lit recreation of the crime scene described in press reports. As observed by (Wolfthal 1993:44), explicit rape imagery became a strategy in the judicial system that required of victims to prove their inculpability through the display of wounding. The display of bodily harm seemed to easily persuade juries and society at large of the victim's innocence. On the floor to the right of Mendieta's feet are bloodied clothes and broken crockery, a clear indication that the victim had fought back. Mendieta's artwork places emphasis on the brutalised body of the victim.



Figure 3: Anna Mendieta, *Untitled rape scene*, 1973  
Photograph documentary of performance,  
39.8 x 31 x 3.2cm (framed),  
(Art Blart 2022: [sp]).

According to Wolfthal (1993:40) in explicit rape imagery a sympathetic response from viewers towards the fallen victim is elicited. The work elicits a response of shock within viewers, purposefully drawing their attention to the horrific nature of rape (Newman 2014:3). Mendieta

refrains from being implicit in her representation of rape because the graphic nature of the image is meant to trigger and potentially re-traumatise viewers in their reception of it. In a catalogue of her work produced by *Centro Galego de Arte Contemporánea Santiago de Compostela* in 1996, Mendieta recalls that the audience had to sit down because the performance had left them jolted (Mendieta 1996: 127).

The absence of the perpetrator in this work becomes apparent. A lack of visual proof that the assailant(s) have been held accountable provides no sense of justice or resolve within the viewer for the victim. Although Mendieta stated that the work was created “as a reaction against the idea of sexual violence against women” (Viso 2004:256), the spectator is left feeling as though the victim’s rape would never be avenged.

### 2.3 The assailant’s plea

Wolfthal observes that the paintings of legendary judges that hung in courtrooms, town halls and sheriff chambers during the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century that were referred to as “justice paintings”. Justice rape imagery served as a model of exemplary behaviour (Wolfthal 1993:59) that depicted assailants enduring severe punishment and justified their execution. However, the perception that arose from these representations was that assailants suffered as a result of the female ‘enabler’ - who, according to Wolfthal (1993:63) was believed to have possessed great sexual power over men and that they often fell prey to this. Due to the emphasis placed on the assailant’s misery in justice rape imagery, viewers were made to sympathise with perpetrators of rape. Wolfthal (1993:63) further notes that because of this blame for rape shifted to victims.

A contemporary example of justice rape representation is provided through the work of South African artist, Lady Skollie. The artist is known for her works in ink, watercolour and crayon that are concerned with ideas of sexuality, pleasure, consent, human connection, violence, and abuse (Maroon 2016:[sp]). In her print titled *#Sorry not sorry*, 2016 the artist recreated local musician Simiso Zwane’s (Okmalumkoolkat) open letter to fans about his sexual assault charges. Zwane served a one-month prison sentence in Tasmania, Australia for groping and kissing a fellow crew member against her will while on tour. According to Maroon (2016: [sp]) the artist presents viewers with the perpetrator’s own words and his sense of suffering to point out how skewed and self-absorbed his perspective on the matter is.

Skollie disrupts the apology letter by purposefully circling pronouns in red that reiterate the ‘I, I, I/ me, me ,me’ tone of the letter, as an examiner would do when pointing out errors in a script.

She is critical of the way in which he presents himself as a victim. To a degree, Skollie’s work could be considered a protest and activist piece, as it critiques South African males’ sexual practices and behaviours. Through this screenprint Skollie suggests that we look inward to reform predatory behaviours<sup>14</sup>. There is no mention of the victim in his public apology note. According to Banks (2017: [sp]), the victim is completely removed from the narrative by virtue of Zwane’s failure to apologise and acknowledge his wrongdoing and how this may have impacted her.

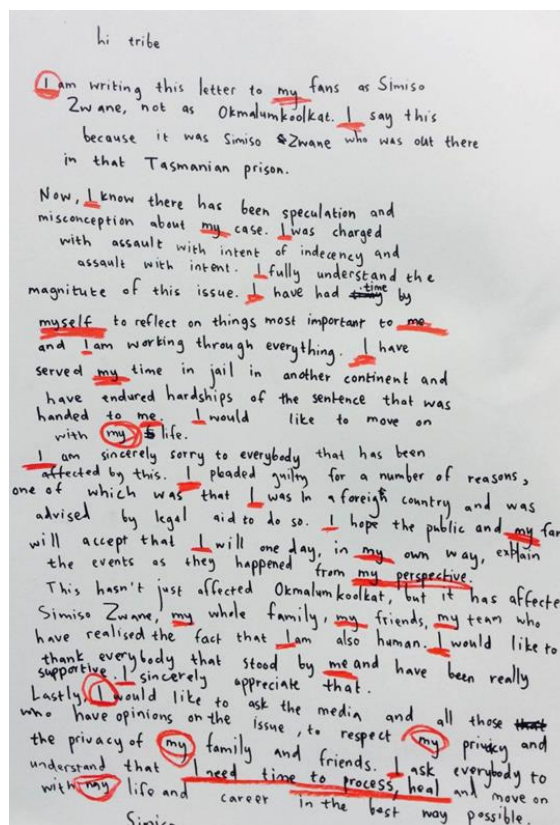


Figure 4: Lady Skollie, #Sorry not sorry, 2016  
Print,  
(Artist Facebook 2017: [sp]).

Skollie (2017:[sp]) had posted her version of the letter onto her Facebook account with the caption “I want to know about HER, HER, HER”. This statement further highlights how in rape scenarios victims often go unheard. Skollie criticises the rapper for not seizing the opportunity to spread a message about male reformation within the context of rape culture in South Africa

<sup>14</sup> Skollie has initiated a social responsibility incentive. When purchasing an edition of the print at R400, the proceeds will be donated to the Albertina Sisulu Rape Crisis Centre in Sunninghill, Johannesburg. More than R15000 has been donated so far. In addition to this, with the help of Between 10and5, Skollie has donated over R8000 to Sonke Gender Justice in aid of their #MenAreTrash campaign.

(Maroon 2016:[sp]). The artist adds that Zwane should have instead condemned sexual violence and vowed to never repeat his mistake again. Skollie's print provides an assailant's perspective of the rape occurrence. Through the rapist's own lacklustre apology, Skollie highlights the injustices committed against a victim as a means to call the rapist out.

Her use of the letter format presents an implicit portrayal of rape in comparison to the figuration seen in both Mntambo and Mendieta's work. As the viewer reads the letter, the first-person narration positions the viewer as either someone who has suffered sexual violation or who has committed such a crime. Thus, the work becomes personal through shifting the position of the viewer. In addition, Skollie's choice to use handwriting instead of typed font for the print, further augments the idea of the letter being personal. The letter written, can be taken from a notepad, private journal or stack of precious paper which may be familiar to the viewer. A written note has intention and a sincerity about it and in Zwane's case, viewers encounter an apology lacking in a sense of accountability and is apparent of how at times perpetrators are oblivious to the lasting harm they cause victims.

## 2.4 Victim accounts

In the different rape representation categories observed by Wolfthal, female victims were presented without a sense of agency, as they were either complacent in heroic rape imagery, portrayed as abused in explicit representations or the initiator of their own rape in justice paintings. What appeared to be missing was a representation of the psychological impact of rape on victims. To avoid the oversimplification of a victim's experience, an account of the endured trauma experienced by those who have survived SGBV is required. To that end, Goliath's work titled, *Personal Accounts*, 2014 will be explored as a form of victims' accounts.

Goliath is a South African artist born in 1983 and is based in Johannesburg. Her conceptual work focuses on the delicate negotiations and representations of gendered and sexualised violence. Her body of work addresses the hardships and experiences of black/brown women and queer life in a way that refuses to adhere to the demarcations set within racial-sexual paradigms of violence that govern post-colonial and post-apartheid social worlds (Goliath 2022:[sp]). To this end, victims presented in Goliath's work do not evince suffered trauma through markers of physical abuse to provoke a response of shock among viewers. Instead, Goliath uses subtle



creative devices such as fragmented speech, repetition of singular words<sup>15</sup> or a voiceless sounding of traumatic experiences relayed by victims. Goliath seeks out alternative means through which to address traumatic experiences that steer clear of stereotypical modes of representation.



Figure 5: Gabrielle Goliath, *Personal Accounts*, 2014  
Five-channel video,  
Installation view at Goodman gallery, Johannesburg 2014,  
(Goodman gallery 2020: [sp]).

The work *Personal Accounts*, (2014) is a five-channel video installation in which women disclose their experiences of domestic violence and rape. Goliath purposely edited the spoken accounts of these women to explore the voice/voiceless dichotomy. The work demonstrates how at times it is difficult for victims to speak of these experiences and hard for others to receive and understand these. Goliath notes that the work omits speech as there are no words for viewers to comprehend. Instead, they are provided with a sounding of noises that lay in-between each spoken word escaping from the victims' mouths. The artist describes these sounds as "a dialogue of gaps [wherein] the residual sonics of breathe, swallows, sighs, laughter [and even] the clearing of a throat, communicate the intimate and vulnerable presence of the women themselves" (Goliath 2022:[sp]). Viewers encounter these victims of SGBV whose statements sound in chorus. Goliath describes these participants as a community of voices that beckons to be heard. The work aims to disrupts the natural flow of breath among viewers, by causing it to quicken in the same manner as the victims' accounts.

<sup>15</sup> Goliath memorialises a friend who passed at a young age due to a domestic dispute in the work title, Berenice (2010- ongoing). The name Berenice is repeated and looped; it is accompanied by a series of portraits of a Coloured woman who shares the name of Goliath's friend. these portraits were taken each year since her friend's passing.

In this chapter the implicit measures available to artists in the representation of rape in art was explored. Through the theoretical contributions of Wolfthal (1993,1999) rape imagery was discussed in the heroic, explicit and justice traditions. Mntambo's painterly-like photographic scene was critiqued for how it eroticises the black, nude female body and was described as a scene of self-rape. The work critiques the conception of black female bodies being permissible to rape.

Mendieta's work exploited the use of shock in its interpretation of a graphic rape crime scene. The display of the victim's brutalised body is intended to re-traumatise viewers to bring awareness to the horrific nature of SGBV. Viewers may sympathise with the victim presented and do not necessarily experience the trauma themselves. Explicit rape imagery falls short of an empathetic connection made between the victim represented in the artwork and the viewer.

Goliath's video installation provides insight of how words may fail victims when having to give an account of abuse or sexual trauma. Describing the encounter of trauma may prove to be difficult because the endurance thereof exceeds language. At times victims may feel that there are a complex set of emotions and feelings that words simply cannot define. As such, the gaps of breath and stutters in Goliath's work speaks to victims' experience of trauma, so that viewers may empathise with victims of SGBV. As viewers take the time to watch the work in stillness as well as listen to the staggered exhales and intake of breath, their bodies subconsciously respond and their breath begins to quicken, strain or slow down. The work provides us with a dialogue shared between the victims on screen and the viewer. In this shared moment it is as though we have collectively come to one accord, like a choir in unison we chant for empathy and stand together in support of victims of SGBV.

The investigations of Wolfthal's rape image categories in art have highlighted the importance of recording public views on sexual violence. Heroic rape imagery desensitised viewers from the brutal nature of the act, even making rape seem desirable when done patriotically to oppress and control enemy communities or under the guise of arranged marriages. The shift towards explicit portrayals of rape presented victims without a sense of agency as they often appeared abused or dead. The graphic nature of these representations revealed the savagery in the crime and shocked viewers into sympathising with victims. Whereas, in justice paintings viewers are confronted with the rape experience from the assailant's viewpoint, shelving blame with the victim as the cause of the perpetrator's action. However, from victims' accounts such as those presented in Goliath's work, rape representations in art no longer need to rely on the imaging

of abuse to express the psychological endurance of trauma. The substitution of bodies with text in Skollie's work and substitution of words with breath in Goliath's work functions as an alternative and implicit measure in creating art about sexual violence.

In my own work I explore other ways to implicitly describe the memory and endured trauma of rape by making sculptural assemblages from found objects. The objects function as placeholders for my and the rapist's body. The work also addresses the negative impact rape had on my family, specifically my relationship with an aunt who raised me and the difficulty I faced trying to sustain my mental health. The conversations I have about representations of sexual trauma in the next chapter are interpreted through various female artists' and my own selection and handling of materials. Furthermore, I discuss how the process of creatively embedding objects with memories of rape is done through bodily engagements during studio practice.

## CHAPTER THREE

### TRAUMA CONJURED THROUGH FOUND OBJECTS

In this chapter I explore how an exhibition of sculptural assemblages may evoke my lived account of acquaintance rape and its subsequent trauma for viewers. I make connections with other contemporary artists' work and how they embed their art with a sense of trauma through the creative transformation of found objects. Herein, I give special regard to the use of the bed as a material source in the creative work of artists such as, Emin, Lucas, Sulkowicz and Katz.

There is also a discussion on assemblage that is used as a creative modality in the artistic work of Salcedo, whose work informs my own art in its attempt to conjure traumatic memories from acquaintance rape. Included in this chapter are personal entries from my journal that poetically coincide with the processes taken to produce the sculptural assemblages as a cogent method to recall and piece together fragmented memories and flashes from rape. I also investigate how the exhibition, *Muffled Violations* may elicit an empathetic sense of viewing in viewers (Bennett 2005:10) as a means to describe how I am able to convey the sexual trauma endured through practice-based approaches that go beyond simply evincing signs of abuse and brutality.

Art is said to have the capacity to affect viewers through its association with the forceful qualities inherent in life that challenge obvious signification and representation (O'Sullivan 2001:125). What this means, for example, is that a used chair taken out of the conventional setting of a living room or office space, where it is made for the functionality of sitting, can be elevated to the stature of an art object in a gallery or trash if discarded in a waste dump. By repositioning the chair into a new environment and presenting it in unique ways, the chair's significance changes. In a gallery setting it may now function to alert viewers of other underlying concepts, such as 'rest' or 'solace' and in my regard, sexual trauma.

The condition in which viewers encounter the chair further adds meaning; has it been polished and taken care of, or does it appear tattered and misused? How do these conditions of presentation impact the viewer to feel something? Viewers are said to have intuitive responses felt within and on their bodies when encountering works of art. Hemmings (2005:551) suggests that the viewer's feelings and responses are transferred onto objects and back onto themselves again upon encountering artworks. Bennett (2005:2) refers to this empathetic sense of viewing as an embodiment of sensation which, at a material level stimulates thought and communicates

something of a lived experience. By simply considering the way in which materials are handled and treated by artists, Hemmings (2005:459) notes that viewers may unexpectedly encounter something in the work that throws them off guard like a jolt to the stomach.

According to Margaret Iversen (2004:49), a Professor in Art History at the University of Essex in England, the object found- as if by chance situates itself between our external environment, perception and unconscious. As such, it holds a peculiar and elusive relation to vision more attuned to affect. This means the found object does not explicitly describe an event, instead remnants of the evident leaves behind traces that, according to Bennett (2005:61), supply little to nearly no information about the individual narratives of absent characters for viewers. Iversen (2004:49) states that the space occupied by the found object is carved out by traumatic experience as it fails to achieve clear or obvious representation. This is further emphasised when positioning traumatic memory as a non-declarative thing alongside an object that cannot 'speak', but rather evokes meaning. According to Bennett (2005:23) when viewers encounter found objects in art there is a bodily response that helps make sense of that which lies outside verbal clarification. This bodily response may be thought of as a form of recognition which Bennett (2005:61) notes, heightens our feelings toward the piece.

### 3.1 Encountering the affects of traumatic memory within beds

In his master dissertation, Australian artist Lionel Bawden (2014:8) describes the bed as a universal object that is associated with intimacy and the privacy of a home. The idea of privacy is further emphasised in his description of hotel rooms with lockable doors within which the exchange of used sheets for a fresh set, qualifies the bedspace as a sacred site and brings to the surface decisions about who we invite to lay beside us (Bawden 2014:8). My understanding of Bawden's (2014) deduction is that our association with the bed is tied to our experiences of it, such as dreaming while asleep, feeling vulnerable, nurturing our health during illness, aid in self-care when one needs to recover from violation and even prepares our bodies for eternal rest.

For me the bed was at first a familial space. Up until the age of eight I spent time with my parents on it, watching video-recorded films on the television set. Everything served a purpose, from the (many) pillows that were fluffed-up for back support and that transformed the bed into a large-scaled couch, to the heavy duvet that hung over our windows to block-out light, and even the spare '*tjalie*' that covered our legs and prevented us from messing popcorn and chocolate on the sheets. Our own make-shift cinema. Before I was brave enough to sleep by

myself, I would rest between the warm bodies of my parents. Back then the bed had been a space for solace and security.

This association to the bed changed when I first witnessed my father physically abuse my mom. He would drag her into their bedroom and lock the door behind them so all that I could hear were her strained breaths and pleas for him to stop. The bed became a site associated with domestic violence and death, the place where he shot her and then himself. In former creative endeavours I used the bed as a material source in my art-making process to memorialise their lives. I staged scenes of their bedroom and imbued it with a presence of their absence. My engagement with the bed had felt cathartic and helped me process their loss.



Figure 6: Caz Peffer, Found pillow in park, 2020.

Personal journal entry: Friday, 29 May 2020.

I took a walk to the park today and spotted something lay in the distance, it seemed to be a stray pillow. It had been discarded by its former owner, who had left it partially exposed from its casing. It was as though they had undressed it. The pillow took on the body of a girl abandoned in a field with her panty drawn down to her knees. It laid covered in dry grass and dirt. The pillow also appeared to have had yellow discolouration on it, possibly from sweat or urine. It appeared wounded, as though it had been used thoughtlessly and thrown out once it served its purpose. It's strange to see something taken from the most intimate and private confines of home- one's bedroom, made public. I wondered to myself about the pillow, who left you there and why in this condition? Why was it that I could see myself in you?

I had hoped as a young adult woman that the bed, especially a double-sized mattress, came with the promise of love. Instead, this hope- like my body, was defiled on its surface. Now the bed and the sheets which cover it had become a site of sexual trauma for me. I could not escape from this re-occurring feature in my life, an essential piece of furniture I would have to return to each night. A bed is a mass-produced thing but does not function as a ready-made in my practice. As a found object it is essentially singular and irreplaceable (Iversen 2004:50). We come across multiple beds in our lives, yet each is uniquely marked by an individual through their engagement with it. A found pillow- much like the one I came across in the park, is singular because the stains on it cannot be replicated. It is irreplaceable because it becomes specific and thus, significant.

Finding a pillow outside the bedroom and in the public setting of a park was unsettling. Bennett (2005:18) puts forward that sensations arising in spaces are an operative element in sustaining a feeling, rather than directly communicating meaning. For me this meant that the lonesome and tattered pillow found on the ground of a children's park (instead of on a mattress at home), appeared strange and chilling. In comparison to the cheer and wonder generated from playing on swings and jungle gyms, the discarded pillow presented visitors with a sense of despair and unease. The pillow no longer facilitated sleep and due to this loss in functionality was equated to trash. From a distance it looked like the dead body of a young girl half undressed. A vivid image of Mrwetyana's discarded body came to mind in this moment and it turned into the image of my own body in my mind. It was the recognition of this pillow as a traumatised object that led me to further explore the bed as a site of sexual trauma in my creative practice.

### 3.2 The bed as a material source in artistic practice

In his research, Bawden (2014:9) explored how artists use the bed as a material source in their art to address issues of birth, sexuality, injury, healing and death. Emin's *My Bed*, 1998 (Figure 7) is an installation made to record the artist's lived experience and presents a confessional piece about her struggle with alcohol, substance abuse, and sexual escapades (Bawden 2014:10). The installation is made from an accumulation of waste and personal effects, such as smoked cigarette buds, dirty underwear and empty alcohol bottles that seem to spill from the bed onto the floor. Bawden (2014:10) suggests that this seepage of waste communicates Emin's powerlessness over compulsion that eventually consumes the body in a metaphorical sense.



Figure 7: Tracey Emin, *My Bed*, 1998  
Installation,  
(Tate 2022:[sp]).

The lived-in quality of Emin's work intrigued me. She reflects on having slept in it, engaging in sex, curing hangovers, and struggling with depression. Tidying up her room was not a priority. However, the space transformed from something disgusting (evidence of her psychological suffering) into something she considered to be part of herself. Emin's experience of trauma as facilitated by living in and on her bed, once showcased in the controlled public setting of a gallery, transformed it into a work of art.

In Sarah Lucas's *Au Naturel*, 1994 (Figure 8), the double-sized mattress propped up against a wall and evokes the bodies of a man and woman. Through the arrangement of materials such as a bucket, two melons and a cucumber standing erect, the scene conveys the sexual act between a couple (Bawden 2014:40). I resonated with how Lucas presented the bed, according to Bawden (2014:41) as "a space on which to fuck" and as a surrogate for human bodies. Lucas's substitution of bodies with found objects in *Au Naturel* (1994) went beyond the mere staging of a scene. My own work had been influenced by the way Lucas installed the piece, in which she considered how else a bed could take up space (rather than laying floor-bound) it inferred the weight of bodies as it sat. My own work suggests the body through the way objects are sculpted and positioned using assemblage for a sense of ambiguity.





Figure 8: Sarah Lucas, *Au Naturel*, 1994  
Installation,  
(LA Art Party 2019:[sp]).

Thomas Nail (2017) a theorist and philosopher on Aesthetics at the University of Denver, seeks to define what assemblage is according to the critical contributions of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari made in 1980. He points out that in the *Oxford English Dictionary* the term ‘assemblage’ means the “joining or union of two things or, the bringing or coming together” of things (Nail 2017:22). However, in the *Le Robert Collins Dictionary* the French translation for assemblage comes from the verb ‘*agencer*’, meaning to arrange, piece together or lay out and as a noun it reads as ‘*agencement*’, a “construction or an arrangement” (Nail 2017:22). He further distinguishes that “[although] an assemblage is a gathering of things into unities, an *agencement* is an arrangement or layout of [assorted] elements” (Nail 2017:22). In my own practice the arrangement of different objects such as chairs or pillows and materials such as pantyhose are juxtaposed together yet remain unfixed due to the fact that these elements change.

My body of work presents the bed as a site of sexual trauma and violation through the creative modality of assemblage and abstraction. In the work, *Shhh relax. They’re gonna hear you*, 2022 (Figure 9) I selected a pair of pillows because they are so human, so familiar and redolent of a couple. The pillows appear to sit, they have weight and seem to be in conversation with each other through the manner of their presentation. These pillows remain locked into each other and become evident of my relationship with my rapist. Through this work I articulate the

memory of him (the top pillow) pressing his weight onto my body in an attempt to subdue and keep me at bay. The pillow beneath him appears compressed and trapped. By lifting one edge of the pillowcase over what I consider to be a knee and leaving the bottom pillow's inners exposed I demonstrated how he undressed me. Through these works I hope to elicit the feeling that something unsettling had occurred aligned with the idea of foul play leading to sexual acts.



Figure 9: Caz Peffer, *Shhh relax. They're gonna hear you*, 2022  
Used pillows, sand, cement, metal frame, fabric, pantyhose & pubic hair,  
54 x 70 x 125 cm.

Male friends from my home in Promosa would seldom pass up the opportunity to describe the vagina as being “*sag soos ’n kussing*”, which means as soft as a pillow. Why a pillow I always wondered? I suppose their perception of the pillow’s opening looked like a vagina and that they often used it to ‘dry hump’ against during masturbation. Additionally, the body most associated with a sense of softness and warmth for my male friends is the female body. The female body is also one easily subdued under the hard pressure and weight of male bodies. Unique to the title of the work, *Shhh relax. They're gonna hear you*, is the idea that pillows may be used as a device to suffocate and muffle out sound. I recall my rapist pressing my mouth closed with his hands. To me this indicated an admission of wrongdoing as he attempted to silence my moans of protest during rape. He was afraid of being caught.

Further along my exploration of other artists’ work with beds, I began to investigate ways in which the bed could facilitate activist interventions towards getting justice for victims of rape.

American artist and rape victim, Sulkowicz performs the act of carrying a twin-sized bed across Columbia University campus in protest to being sexually violated by a fellow student. Bawden (2014:24) notes that in the work *Carry that weight*, 2016 (Figure 10), the bed substitutes Sulkowicz's violated body and speaks to an intrusion of her private sanctuary (Bawden 2014:25). Sulkowicz notes that the mattress is just the right size for her to carry and continue with her day, but that overtime it becomes heavy and is something she struggles with (Bawden 2014:24), just as enduring sexual trauma becomes a mental struggle for victims. Through the modality of performance, Sulkowicz's bed is a site of the personal experience of rape made public (Bawden 2014:24), to provoke protest and gain support among spectators for victims of SGBV.



Figure 10: Emma Sulkowicz, *Carry that weight*, 2016  
Performance,  
(Metro 2021: [sp]).

Sulkowicz had one specific condition to her performance that I found striking, spectators were allowed to offer their assistance in carrying the mattress, but the artist was not allowed to ask for help. This speaks to the difficulty in generating support systems after the experience of rape. Often victims feel alone and at times people simply refuse to get involved. This led me to think of the friends and family members who offered me their support and those who did not. When they could provide a sense of comfort the weight of trauma lightened, even if just momentarily. However, the burden that came with the experience of rape never left me. Sulkowicz's work demonstrates that with the collective support of a community the weight of suffering sexual trauma is made bearable.

I found similarities in Sulkowicz's and my own practice for how the manipulation of objects unfolds due to a bodily engagement with them. For Sulkowicz it is the carrying of the mattress

and for myself the action of hand-ironing out creases left on the duvet after sleep or sex. The creative process is not only physically demanding but psychologically strenuous as well in both practices. The performative aspect of Sulkowicz's work encouraged me to video document my engagement with other objects associated with the bed such as a duvet (Figure 11) during studio practice. The repetitive act of hand-ironing or pressing out wrinkles left on top of the sheets whilst bent over on my knees appeared prayer-like, as though it was a ritual. This performance indirectly calls out my rapist for his attempt at covering up his crime and removing evidence of his presence from the scene. However, the smoothness obtained during hand-ironing never remained permanent and the duvet would naturally wrinkle up from the humidity of the studio it was left in. My work differs from Sulkowicz's in that the performative quality of it remains private (studio-bound), it does not offer public activist/protest intervention.



Figure 11: Duvet piece: Hand iron, (studio practice), 2020  
Wrinkled duvet.

I associate pillows and bedsheets with personal, intimate things and acts. I find that there is a subtlety within the visual language retained in corporeal traces left behind on pillows during sleep, such as drool and how its discolouration resembles dry semen/cum or how oily hair stains make one think of sweat or urine. Viewers encounter secretions from my body left on pillow casings and duvets that invoke the object to create a sense of unease within them. As such, the objects in the exhibition, *Muffled Violations* (2022) suggests the body. They are manipulated to suggest use or misuse.

Still, my artistic intervention with the duvet and pillows felt as though I remained within the realm of staging. The objects themselves did not change much and could easily be recognised for what they were. So, I searched for methods to further abstract and transform the bed as a material source in my practice. I was influenced by the South African artist, Katz who was born in 1993 in Kimberly. Katz is best known for her sculptural installations made from discarded

mattresses. In reference to her work with beds Katz mentions that her creative practice engages ideas of land as a source of memory and trauma (Katz [sa]:[sp]). This mode of thinking is derived from the cultural teachings given to the artist by her elders about soil being a blanket and a dream space that reconnected her to her ancestors. The artist deconstructs mattresses to expose their springs, she incorporates pot scourers onto these springs and makes sculptural drawings from the wire of mattresses.



Figure 12: Bronwyn Katz, *Sand Kombers*, 2016  
Mattress foam & wire,  
155 x 85 x 15 cm,  
Artist website (2022:[sp]).

In an online discussion with Zoe Whitely (curator for the White Cube), Katz explained that in the work *Sand Kombers*, 2016 she desperately wanted to put back together the pieces of a foam mattress that she had cut up before. This change of decision came in response to the discovery and exhumation of bodies beneath a development in Kimberly that she read about. She thought about what it meant to take a body from the earth (Katz 2022:[sp]) and to present it with traces of damage. The surface of the foam pieces is scratched into, sewn together with wire, and hung on a wall. These scratches resemble scars and sections of skin stitched back together to heal. The mattress served as a placeholder for a contorted body and reaffirmed the discomfort victims endure when healing from trauma. Although the bed stands in as a metaphor for land in Katz's work, it still successfully communicates the human body and a sense of the trauma

suffered. In my work, the bed also acts as a placeholder for bodies and the memories of violation that occurred on that site.

Katz mentions that because a bed is associated with the floor, it functions as something to lay on. However, she wanted to change viewers' understanding of the object by having the mattress occupy space in a different way, by having it wall mounted. This decision came from her exposure to western art practices in painting. The artist says that she did not want spectators looking down at the work, but rather to have the mattress meet their gaze (Katz 2022:[sp]). I too, considered wall mounting my duvet piece, because I did not want viewers looking down on my experience of acquaintance rape and endured trauma.

Katz's work addresses notions of space and place as a lived experience through the imagery of a bed, specifically how land is able to communicate the memory of its occupants and their histories of trauma (Katz [sa]:[sp]). The stitching together of pieces of sponge with wire is a violent thing, yet it mends together what was once forcibly separated. For me *Sand Kombers*, 2016 starts resembling a map of the collective and shared experience of trauma in the socio-political context of South Africa. Whereas in my use of the bed the corporeal stains left on a duvet speak to the traumatic memory of rape.



Figure 13: Duvet piece, work in progress (studio shot), 2020.  
Used duvet & found mattress springs.

In my own attempt to remake the bed and interpret my experience of acquaintance rape, the mattress itself presented a dilemma. When further developing the duvet piece (Figure 13), I had begun to dismantle a mattress frame I had found in the park behind my home. Cutting the coils free from the bedframe and stretching them apart proved difficult and physically painful. To address the kind of penetrative intrusion of my rapist's penis into my vagina, I forced the

bedsprings into the fabric of a duvet inner and did so only on one side. This particular side represented my violated body and was intended to appear as a growth of springs erupting from the fabric just as an ingrown hair would against the skin. I was informed by my supervisor that viewers may mistake the inclusion of mattress coils to former work produced by Katz, so I thought to remove them from the duvet inner. To my delight rust from the bedsprings stained the duvet inner around their point of entry and had exposed puncture wounds. In truth, this had been the subtlety I sought after in my work, to provide barely visible traces of violation.

Personal journal entry: Tuesday, 5 February 2019

I thought I had a peaceful night of sleep alone on top of the covers of his bed- I recall he said he would take the couch. My denim jacket weighed on me and forced me to wake, my dress hadn't appeared to move up my thighs during the evening's tossing and turning...had I slept dead still? It seemed likely I did, I often sleep like a rock I thought to myself. Just to confirm whether or not I did, I turned over to check if the duvet was messy. It wasn't, it was hand-pressed straight. Almost as though ironed free of any body impression that could have been made. Damn Caz! You were really out cold *gurlll!*



Figure 14: Caz Peffer, *I didn't rape you, we fucked*, 2022  
Used duvet & inner on wood,  
142 x 187 cm.

The duvet is something that spans over the surface of a bed, it covers up and conceals bodies within it. When one draws back sheets it exposes bodies as well. Bed sheets provide warmth, comfort and protection. Overtime they smell, become dirty and are in need of washing similar

to the human body. A duvet can be weighted or light. It folds into and around one's body. It holds a temporal impression of the body and leaves behind wrinkles of mess and activity. Bed sheets are hung out to dry and are left exposed to the public when on a washing line. By presenting them in a gallery space for an exhibition, sheets taken from the private confines of a bedroom and brought into the public are given new meaning. The navy-blue duvet cover I selected is intended to convey a masculine presence. It suggests that the bedding belonged to my rapist, that the incident occurred in his apartment and ultimately that he is to blame and responsible for my trauma.

The artwork, *I didn't rape you, we fucked*, 2022 (Figure 14) is derived from the memory of waking up on the day after I had been raped. The title of the artwork is taken directly from the rapist's response when confronted with questions about what had transpired between us. Viewers encounter a navy-blue duvet mounted onto the wall of the gallery. On its surface are discoloured stains which are faded hues achieved overtime through acts of sleep, sex and constant washing. My intervention with the duvet as a found object in this case, needed to go beyond the mode of staging and the setting of a scene.

The story I intended to tell was of how my body was defiled, penetrated and used during a state of unconsciousness. Katz's preference for wall-mounting her sponge mattress influenced the way I resolved this piece as it originally laid on the floor. The partially covered duvet on the wall allowed me to perceive the piece as a painting instead of a bed surface. This change in perspective provided me with the opportunity to rescript the narrative of rape for myself, from disgraceful to liberating. The work reclaims a sense of justice and courage on my behalf by having my rapist's crime meet him and other perpetrators at eye level if they ever encountered my work. This work is a confrontation in which I call out my rapist through a visual language of subtle iron-burn marks, torn sheets, an exposed duvet inner and pubic hair.

The mark-making and composition I employed was compiled from purposefully tearing the covers on the left side of the duvet to suggest an open wound. There was a deliberate violence to the portrayal of rape in this instance, one that spoke of how I felt like damaged goods despite not having suffered a violent assault. Each fold was fixed and sewn into position and this spoke to my psychological condition at the time, that I felt stuck. I tried mending the torn pieces of fabric together, but the stitching remained visible like a scar. On closer inspection viewers encounter coil-like pubic hairs woven into the fabric of the duvet inner, just like hair from one's



head would weave itself into the surface of pillowcases I sewed my own into the inner, as though to affirm that this violation truly happened to 'me'.

Furthermore, the work *I didn't rape you, we fucked*, 2022 also speaks to how I found myself dressed up after having been undressed, which meant that he tried to conceal the truth from me. The bed had been made, while removing all evidence that he had been there, exposes his attempt to cover up a crime. To the right of the work, I mimicked my rapist's actions by flattening the folds and impressions left on the duvet cover. I had held an iron up against the sheet with the intention to burn through the fabric on his side of the bed. I found that the fabric was stubborn and refused to burn through. It retained a burn mark in the shape of the iron's plate after 45-55 minutes of constant pressure. This also hardened the burnt area, stiffening the fabric and fixing the mark (evidence of his crime) in place.

The plural 'we' fucked, in the title suggests I participated in my own raping. The statement was a partial acknowledgement by him of having had sex with me, but it also served as a non-admission of rape. As a victim I was made to accept my participation in the act. I was left stuck in the inconclusiveness of that statement, wondering did I or did I not take part in my own violation? This work also suggests the idea of spillage during sex, specifically the reckless mess made during drunk sex which my rapist said to be the case. In *I didn't rape you. We fucked*, 2022 the draping resembles a vagina left open like a wound festering. My work is intended to conjure memories within viewers of their own personal experiences of SGBV and what they were made to feel by perpetrators.

In this section of the chapter, I have investigated the ways in which the bed has been used as a material source in art practice. I have located the commonalities and differences between the work of other female artists and that of my own to be that the bed often becomes a placeholder for bodies, their experiences (specifically of trauma) and relationships. Through my artistic explorations the bed become a corporeal thing that mapped the lived experiences of acquaintance rape through impressions and stains made from sweat, urine, semen and even pubic hair. Furthermore, the bed functioned as a tool for protest on which I could metaphorically keep record of my rapist's wrong-doing. The bed as a material source in my work gave voice to the psychological impact I continue to endure.

### 3.3 Evoking an empathetic response through sculptural assemblages

In this section of the chapter, I explore how the Columbian artist, Salcedo uses an exhibition of found objects embedded with memories of trauma to incite an empathetic response from viewers. I further discuss how Salcedo's practice informed the way I approached the making and presenting of sculptural assemblages entrenched with the traumatic memory from acquaintance rape for viewers in my exhibition. Salcedo creates sculptural installations of found objects taken from domestic dwellings out of compassion for victims as a way of telling their stories of suffering due to political violence. According to Kelly (2012), professor of philosophy at the University of North California and president of the Transdisciplinary Aesthetics Foundation, the aesthetic transformation of objects such as furniture in Salcedo's work brings political awareness to bearing witness to those whose suffering often goes unseen (Kelly 2012:131).

Viewers encounter objects from their everyday that are associated with feelings of familiarity, comfort and the safety of a home. Salcedo artistically transforms furniture and clothing to appear unsettling and disquieting (Kelly 2012: 141). Schneider-Enrique (2016) mentions in a discussion held with Salcedo at the Harvard Art Museum, that although the artist's body of work does not reveal the identity of a particular individual or of a specific violent incident, viewers still get the sense that something disturbing has occurred (Schneider-Enrique 2016:[sp]).

Bennett (2005:8) adds that the presentation of a 'character' may falsely convince viewers into a particular kind of sympathetic response based on body politics. Bennett (2005:11) also notes that the kind of art that deals with trauma rarely employ strategies of shock and horror as in Mendieta's explicit rape image, *Untitled rape scene*, 1973. It is for these same reasons that both Salcedo and I avoid showing the body of victims and perpetrators. In the contexts of South Africa, black female bodies such as my own already come with a loaded racial history set in oppressive colonial and apartheid violence. I avoid racial stereotypes in my work by refraining from presenting bodies. Instead, both Salcedo and I substitute found objects for bodies.

In the work *Unland: the orphan's tunic*, 1997 (Figure 15) Salcedo responds to the testimony of a six-year-old girl who witnessed her parents being killed. While interviewing the girl, Salcedo realised that while the girl was unable to verbally articulate her loss and trauma, she kept wearing a dress made by her mother on each day they spoke (Bennett 2005:60). The sensitive nature of the interviews that Salcedo conducts with victims of trauma allows her to identify potential objects to make artwork from. She responds directly to the victim's account of suffering and does not premeditate what materials are necessary to produce the work.



Figure 15: Doris Salcedo, *Unland: the orphan's tunic*, 1997  
Wooden tables, silk, human hair and thread  
80 × 245,1 × 97,8 cm  
Installation view & detail,  
Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago (2020: [sp]).

In this work the girl's body is substituted with a tunic that is stretched out onto a strangely elongated dining table. Bennett (2005:61) notes that the interweaving of silk and human hair which is hand-sewn through the holes of the wooden table stands in for the absent girl. Every incision of hair sewn into the table reads as a violent marker that leaves behind a wound. The dining table itself as it stands empty and void of chairs alerts viewers to the loss of familial bonds. Schneider-Enrique (2016:[sp]) puts forward that viewers might miss these nuances if Salcedo's work is not apprehended slowly with close, careful and a contemplative sense of looking. According to Bennett (2005:61) the viewers' affective responses towards the artwork is determined by their recognition of the elements juxtaposed in the piece, such as identifying human hair. The viewer's feelings towards the work can be heightened by an increased bodily investment during the viewing process (Bennett 2005:61).

The girl's dress in *Unland: the orphan's tunic*, 1997 is unrecognisable to viewers. It has been used as a sheer skin to cover a portion of the dining table's surface and this makes it seem ghostly. Salcedo has succeeded in transforming the original dress into something new and ambiguous. During the conception of the work, *You even came twice*, 2022 (Figure 16) I thought of how to transform the shape of bedsheets (flat and boxy when placed over a mattress) into something new and other. The drape-like appeal of the fitted sheet afforded me the opportunity to create a vagina as an opening that viewers could stick their hand into.



Figure 16: Caz Peffer, *You even came twice*, 2022  
Fitted sheet, stuffing, genital fluid & pubic hair & detail,  
21 x 125 cm.

The thinking behind the work is inspired by the idea of my body being used as a cum sack. The form resembled a stretched-out condom stained with discharge and semen left inside of it. This piece is made from a fitted bed sheet, stuffing and a pillowcase. It presents the viewer with the opportunity to engage with the work. The hole is deep enough for audience members to fist. They come into contact with stains obtained from wiping my vagina of fluid and pubic hair. The vessel speaks to my objectified body and how it was turned into a depository for cum. The act of wiping myself clean of vaginal spillage during studio practice was an attempt to convey that I wanted to purify myself from the 'dirty' act. My rapist told me that he could recall that I orgasmed twice during the encounter- I must have been dripping wet. This statement inspired the way I approached the treatment of the sheet and allowed me to retain these corporeal traces as a mark-making device that stood in as evidence of acquaintance rape.

In the work, *You passed out, so I pushed dem panties to the side*, 2022 (Figure 17), I convey the very scenario pointed out in the titling of the piece. I had returned to my use of the bed by means of stripped mattress frames and had discarded the employment of the knotted band. Instead, I only used the panty part of the stockings as a stand in to identify which of the two bodies suggested is the victim. This particular piece of undergarment rests so intimately against one's vagina that the smell lingers long after one wears the pair of stockings. It held markings

from me wiping off vaginal fluid and clearing off nail polish. It retained its used and lived-in integrity.

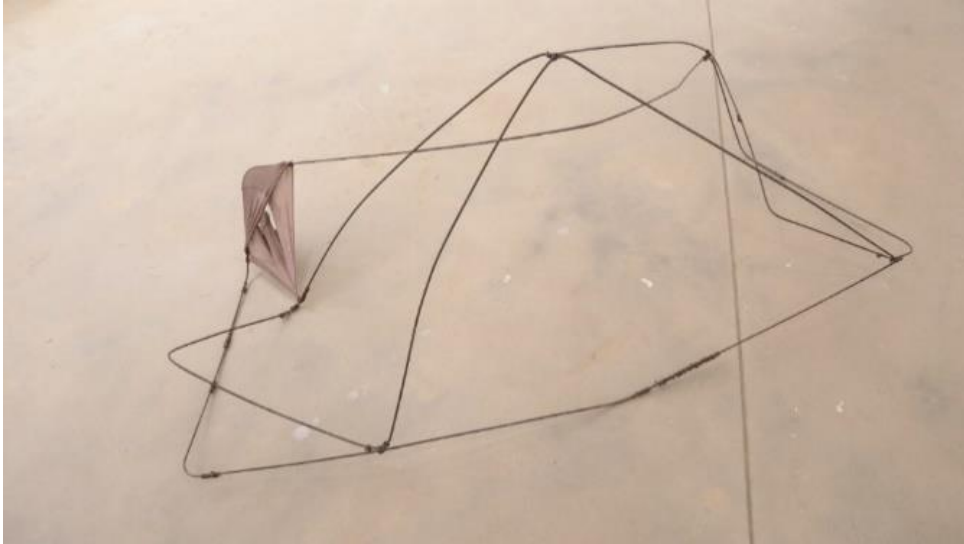


Figure 17: Caz Peffer, *You passed out, so I pushed dem panties to the side*, 2022  
Mattress frames, pantyhose, pubic hair,  
135 x 83 x 68 cm.

Other creative interventions made for the work constituted sewing unruly strands of my pubic hair into the hosiery's surface. This form of intervention expanded my practice from simply staging found objects into a scene of trauma. The mattress frames were forcibly bent into position to give the impression of two bodies reclined. One body (substituted by a mattress frame) tries to sexually advance the other, who supposedly is asleep. The panty is stretched over the corner/knee of the bottom mattress frame. As blatantly stated in the title of the work, what I intend for the viewer to read is someone intruding on another person for quick sexual gratification. The mattress frames are locked into each other by means of welding. I specifically did not want the frames as separate pieces that needed reassembling.

The work, *Ordentlike meisies sit toe bene*, 2022 (Figure 18), is a self-portrait made from a found hollow steel chair, similar looking to those taken from my aunt's kitchen. It follows assumptions of what decent and morally good women should be and her behaviour in society. Women are discouraged from being perceived as a temptress who leave their legs spread open as an invite for male attention, since decent girls sit with their legs closed. The work speaks to having to earn my place and sense of agency by following the rules of men and how restrictive these types of conditions are.



Figure 18: Caz Pepper, *Ordentlike meisies sit toe bene*, 2022  
Used chair, pantyhose & fabric,  
54 x 77 x 38 cm.

I have tied fabric in certain areas around the legs of the chair to create a soft and plump feel, in comparison to the exposed steel frame of the chair. It gives the chair curves such as those of a woman and this thought is attributed to the stereotype that women feel soft. The chair remains fixed with her legs closed. There is no opportunity for entry/penetration except for when a viewer actively decides to place their hand in an opening on top where the seat of the chair would have occupied space. The viewer risks being spotted engaging with the chair in this manner if indeed the viewer felt provoked to fondle the chair. Could she (the chair) be left alone and gazed at from a distance, or does it remain objectified? The chair sits, unfrontational, towards the viewer who stands over her. I left the chair partially undressed with a slither of sheer fabric hanging loosely over back support, or “shoulder”. The self-portrait could be read as the sensual aftermath of a sexual encounter. However, the pantyhose constraints on its legs suggests violation.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### OPEN LETTERS

According to Bennett (2005:3), sexual trauma is difficult to describe and exceeds conventional modes of representation. What this means is that, simply displaying signs of physical abuse on the body of victims of SGBV does not fully translate their complex experiences of trauma. I understood that a relation of my experience of acquaintance rape, through the graphic representation of my body as wounded, would oversimplify the trauma I have endured and will continue to live with. This chapter functions as a reflective account of the revelations made about healing, processes of recovery and studio practice as a cathartic modality. It reads as though it were written in a journal and provides readers insight into why the body of works within *Muffled Violations* (2022) can be understood as material evocations of sexual trauma. Within this chapter, I also explore the significance of material engagement that provoke embodied sensations within me during the making process, so that viewers may encounter the affects of memories embedded in my practice.

#### 4.1 Strategies towards a sense of healing

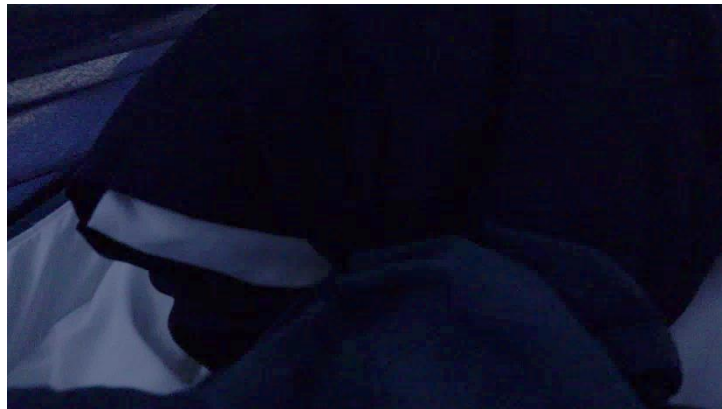


Figure 19: Caz Peffer, *Stay still, I'll make you enjoy it*, 2022  
Video still (edition of 2),  
3min 40sec.

Personal journal entry: Wednesday 19 August 2020

He even made sure to add that I came twice, the nerve! I must have been creamy as fuck because, my body remembers that intrusion feeling pleasurable- like you said *mos*, I came twice so I wasn't about to argue. My flashbacks resemble scenes from porn, like the kind I search for in private. The reality of my experience of rape is mixed up in fantasy as if I orchestrated it so.

The video piece titled, *Stay still, I'll make you enjoy it*, 2022 (Figure 19) was conceived during my darkest struggle with depression over the last three years, in which I found myself pinned to my bed and unable to escape the weight of the sheet on top of me. This weighted duvet reminded me of when I was unable to fight my rapist off my body. I had fallen into the habit of revisiting flashbacks from the rape event and started watching pornography that resembled my scenario. I was chasing after the heightened sense of arousal that I had experienced during the acquaintance rape, as though I was an addict with an uncontrollable craving for an erotic release of sexual bliss. I then proceeded to compulsively masturbate in order to induce a state of dead sleep to avoid having to deal with the reality of the trauma since after the rape. I referred to this habit as a self-soothing method. When really, all it did was cause more devastation and often brought my recovery process to a halt and left me unable to make art.

The 'fix' was always short-lived, it was a toxic approach to healing and without fail left me feeling retraumatised. Despite these facts, the self-soothing method still persisted and become a daily ritual that I thought to record on video to help better understand why I would put myself through such harm. The results from the footage offered me a deeper understanding of my body's experience of violation and objectification. It provided a point from which to accept my body's betrayal and an opportunity to process any feelings of culpability and shame that I felt.

From this point on, masturbating was no longer just a means of escape from having to deal with depression and anxiety. The act became a performative strategy towards making art in order to heal. Removing myself from the confines of the bedroom to tend to this practice in studio was significant in shifting my thinking of this self-care method. This time around, playing with myself to develop an artwork felt like a labour of love and fed into my curiosity about pleasure politics and consent.

In the process shot below named, *Mas\_video*, 2022 (Figure 20), a pillow and I are seen under the covers of bed sheets. The creative process involved a bodily interaction with the pillow through enactments of sexual stimulus such as fondling, slow undressing of it out of its casing in the same way my dress had been lifted above my waist, as well as fingering and dry humping. Influence for the handling of materials is taken from visual cues as seen in pornographic content on the internet. When I type pillow humping into the search engine of various porn sites, to my surprise what appears are various clips of women's use of pillows during self-pleasure.





Figure 20: Mas\_video, work in progress (studio practice), 2022.

What I had expected to find were men's use of pillows as cum depositories or in my terms, makeshift/ DIY vaginal openings<sup>16</sup>. In this case, the pillow as an inanimate object stands as a reminder that my body was made a thing of and to be used for the sexual gratification of another. My thighs held the pillow in place and subdued it underneath my body's pressure. In that instance I became the aggressor and gained a false sense of control, only in that I could determine the outcome of my material engagements as the artist.

I sought out to develop my own visual language through this bodily entanglement with materials. I would intentionally wipe off the wetness from my genitalia in hopes of leaving a white residue and odour upon the fabric as a form of mark-making. Each crease pressed against the sheet remained as evidence of how the pillow and my body moved. I gave allowance for dust build-up by keeping the duvet floor-bound as this attributed to the sheet's worn-in quality.

During the creation of the video, I adhered to a few things; the video was shot in an enclosed room under the covers of bedsheets. I had taken point of view shots (POV)<sup>17</sup> from the perspective of the fondler/artist/perpetrator of the inanimate object as I lay on top of the pillow. POV shots in pornography are usually taken with hand-held devices such as a mobile cell phone. They do not expose the participant's full bodies and only reveal partial body shots. There

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<sup>16</sup> Instead, one will find blow up dolls, vaginal/anal sex toys designed for this purpose. I found a few clips of a man who made thigh-like forms using weighted sandbags that he stacked on top of each other to insert his penis in-between. That form appeared life-like and similar to an average sized woman.

<sup>17</sup> A cinematography method in amateur/homemade porn films.

is a strong focus on sexual organs such as the genitals, mouth, breasts and anus. The idea for this video work came from the conception of acts of necrophilia influenced by videos of men sexually advancing women who are asleep or incapacitated and in which the participant often appears unaware of the video being recorded. My own encounter of acquaintance rape took on this very same register and served as an access point towards the making of the work *Stay still, I'll make you enjoy it*, 2022 (Figure 19).

The title of the video work inspired by search engines and the language associated with internet pornography such as 'passed out girl at college party' or 'slipped it in while asleep, or fucked her awake', but are also directly quoted from what I recall he said to me about the event upon asking him. The graphic titling of the work comes from a dark humoured sensibility as a coping mechanism. It occurred to me that I have come across this use of language before while casually hanging out with friends. I would hear my male friends describe their sexual exploits in a graphic manner, which would be met with statements such as, '*hulle het gravel geet*', which meant these women 'ate gravel', that in turn implied that they ate faeces- ultimately suggesting they had engaged in anal sex. The sex act was rarely spoken of with sensitivity or a sense of dignity. The title also works to indicate the long-standing issues about the inner dealings of the dating culture and the ways in which rape is perceived in the context of South Africa. This puts forward that if you remain still, or rather quiet, that you can be persuaded into complying. More so, suggesting that the victim will end up enjoying being implicitly coerced into having sex.

In the video work, *Stay still, I'll make you enjoy it*, 2022 (Figure 19) the camera motion remains unsteady and that obscures imagery. The device could easily fall out of my hand and that type of accident is welcomed, because it also occurs in the recording of homemade porn. Sound plays a great role in which attention is placed on instances of heavy breathing, grunts and moans recorded during acts of masturbation. The rubbing of sheets against my naked body and against the fabric of the pillowcase, further obscures the sound in the film. The film is shot at night, under the covering of a duvet in poor lighting emanating from the mobile phone's flash. My body is intentionally withheld from the viewer. Instead, the video only shows a hand fondling and attempting to undress a pillow. My intention is to elicit a sense of unease within viewers who are now exposed to unsolicited sexual content to address issues of consent. There is an ethical component to consider for this particular work and as such, no viewers under the age of 18 are advised to watch.

The presentation of the film brought on its own challenges, during its first viewing I had used a television to display the work on. My thinking behind this was to stage the TV as though found in a bedroom (mounted on a wall or standing on a dresser). The large scale of the screen drew in a big audience and viewing became a shared experience among the group. When the sound was played aloud through the television's speakers, it was not clear and the work's meaning was lost. I had intended for it to feel intrusive, there was an element of privacy missing. Playing the clip from a used cell phone device solved the scale issue. Through the idea that porn is often watched in private, playing the video from a cell phone meant one spectator could engage with the video at a time. The sound, now played through headsets, became clearer and viewers could pick on subtle breaths, escaped moans, the faint sounds of wetness from fingering and salivation. The phone possessed other visual traits such as, a cracked screen and greasy fingerprint marks that attributed to its used quality. In addition, implied that it belonged to a certain individual and that viewers could now access and intrude on this individual's private content.

I considered the duration of the video extensively in that often internet porn and amateur home-made footage lasts an estimate time of 19 seconds to 4 minutes. These were short clips, as they were often taken of unsuspecting people. One can rarely make out the identity of actors captured in these clips, the footage is blurry and uncoordinated due to the jerkiness of the hand-held recording device. In this work viewers hear sounds of me masturbating to sexual fantasies in my head. It took a while for me to get into 'character' and at times I would doze off, just to wake up aroused. This is when I would record myself because I had forgotten the tape was on. As such, the viewer witnesses unscripted performances of masturbation juxtaposed against the imagery of pillow fondling.

I did not try to mimic the thrusting motions that come easily to men, instead I was restricted to rubbing and pushing my body up against the pillow. I slipped my hand inside the stuffing within the casing and proceeded to fondle and undress the pillow. Still, no penetration is achieved. The image progresses into rough pulls and shoving that enhance the tension and build up to a climatic point that is suggestive of the victim's/pillow's unsolicited orgasm.

The artwork deals with my body's sense of betrayal and brought on a deeper understanding of my response to the acquaintance rape. In truth it was not my fault that my body had been coerced into experiencing physical pleasure. I could not have taken part in my own rape because, I was not in the right state of mind to consent in the first place. I did not ask to be

raped, I do not have to blame myself and feel shame for having experienced arousal during violation anymore.

I have not completely healed from this experience. However, what I learnt from the making of the film was a greater understanding of my body's defence response in sexual assault. That it is not unusual to experience arousal during rape. Furthermore, I no longer had to endure shame. The work opens up discussions about consent and what it means in relation to the viewer. I knowingly expose the audience to acts of masturbation and this may even seem unethical. In doing so I aim to make people aware that they should always ask for consent.

#### 4.2 A game called Mama-safe

Personal journal entry: Monday 12 August 2019

You were a friend. You blindsided me and now I feel betrayed. How do we go from flirting on WhatsApp to you raping me?

Initially I had an interest in interpreting my sense of betrayal between friends who were on the verge of becoming lovers yet found themselves entangled in a situation of sexual violation, one of foul play. At this point in the making of the bed series I felt stuck. Somehow, I could not access this sense of sexual tension I had intended to. The type of tension that speaks of the pleasures and playfulness of flirtation while simultaneously addressing the danger inherent in a game of attraction. More so, how such a game plays out in the context of dating in South Africa when juxtaposed against its rape culture. During the making process I employed a bodily engagement with materials and found objects as a creative and intuitive means of embedding and visually interpreting traumatic memories of experiencing acquaintance rape and its subsequent trauma.

I was reminded of a game called *Mama-safe*, that I played on the streets of Promosa, a Coloured township in Potchefstroom. In my thinking of a game, I had considered that one plays with those whom you feel safe around and are familiar with, friends. There are also rules of engagement to consider whilst at play such as, penalties, loopholes, fair and foul play, trickery, blindsiding your opponent and disadvantaging them amongst having fun as well. *Mama-safe* possessed these qualities as well as providing a material evocation of boundaries through which I could interpret concepts of consent.

*Mama-safe* can be considered an extension of skipping rope. However, to play the game, one is required to cut a pair of stockings into strips that are stretched, cut and tied together to form a soft, thin knotted band. This band is placed around the bodies of two players facing each other from opposite ends to create an enclosed boundary. Through this game I interpret a scenario between two opponents engaged in flirtatious play to highlight the sexual tension and fine lines to danger between my rapist and me. Other players then proceed to jump into, out of and over this knotted boundary, in hopes of completing a series of challenges before advancing further. Each level of difficulty is demarcated on the bodies of the players holding up the game, starting with the easiest at the feet and then the knotted band is moved upward on the body positioned at the knees, thighs, buttocks, waistline, underarms, neck and head. After completing each level successfully, players are required to call out 'Mama-safe' to avoid penalty. Penalties occur if any player snaps or gets entangled in the band and if any jumps are done incorrectly, from the wrong side of the game or are missed.



Figure 21: The game *Mama-safe* being played, 2020.  
Video stills (fieldwork footage).

In the video footage of playing the game *Mama-safe* (above), I considered that in the act of play my breath becomes heavy and strained. When my breath is listened to out of context, at times it may sound like moans, whether pleasurable or painful. There were thuds produced by my feet from jumps that hit the ground that created violent impact. The activity of play, due to its dynamic movements could convey an act of violence. In the consideration of hosiery as a material source in my practice I understood the conventional association to it with women's attire. When worn it sits on the body and is stretched over the curvature of skin. Pantyhose soaks up sweat and urine, can be stained with discharge and it retains these smells. At times, even pubic hair weaves its way through the threads of hosiery fabric.

In Lucas' work, *Pauline Bunny* (1997) a pair of whole stockings takes on human form and acts as a vessel that cups genitalia and accentuates the bodice. According to Sterling Ruby (2013:[sp]) Lucas's stuffed sculpture appears as soft to the touch as a women's thigh would. The stuffed form is clamped to its chair and its legs are positioned apart in an inviting manner. The stuffed form looks similar to a blow-up doll, bringing attention to the lower half of its body where the sexual organs are positioned and as stand-in for the whole female body. This work presents women as temptresses. It is further noted by Ruby (2013:[sp]) that Lucas's work seems stuck in-between a sense of sexualised formalism and figurative abstraction. For my own work, I wanted to escape this bodily association to hosiery as a material and to expand on its capacity to convey the female form. I know that when worn, hosiery holds the body and I wanted to uncover if the material did more than just resemble the human form and instead speak to a sense of corporeality.



Figure 22: Caz Peffer, *Foul play in the flirt game*, 2022  
Wire maquettes & pantyhose (series of 5),  
21 x 11,5 x 22 cm.

In the series *Foul play in the flirt game*, 2022 (Figure 22) I returned to the playing of the game *Mama-safe*, reinterpreting it through the use of humble materials such as paper, soft wire, polystyrene, pantyhose and the processes of assemblage. The wire legs stand in for human bodies, which would have been a pair of players facing each other. I positioned the legs in a manner that mimic the action of playing the game. What becomes interesting is where the pantyhose sits on the wire legs. This bodily demarcation made by the pantyhose around the wire seems to convey a pulling closer, a pushing away and a forceful tension between the two counterparts. It is in this tension that one could speak to moments of sexual tension felt

between my rapist and I. The work speaks to our romantic interest and text flirtations in that it is meant to appear playful. However, the series also reveal a power dynamic between the two characters, exposing who among the two is the perpetrator and who is the victim.



Figure 23: Caz Peffer, *Dra tights onder jou rok*, 2022  
Video stills (edition of 3),  
2min 16sec.

In the video *Dra tights onder jour rok*, 2022 (Figure 23), I play *Mama-safe* from one side of a bedroom and opposite me is a chair, much like the one from my aunt Muriel's kitchen. While playing we were made aware of the potential dangers of being outdoors. The video cuts off abruptly at the moment the chair falls and the fall seems inevitable, as if to say violation is inevitable. I brought the exposed mattress into the video frame as an added element with which to articulate a narrative of sexual violation. The film tends to the idea that flirtation is playful at first but that it may turn and end up harming a person. My mother, aunt or older cousin would scold me for not wearing shorts or tights under my dresses to play. They never failed to caution us by saying that “*die ou oupas gaan ons so uit kyk*”.

Playing as little girls we remained mindful of the men around us in public spaces as to not attract unwanted attention to ourselves. Exposing one's panty during the motion of play could potentially entice men to make advancements. We were always mindful of the threat men posed to us. We were taught to stay alert by adopting preventative measures, such as walking in groups when out late, to not dress provocatively, to monitor our alcohol intake and to not accept open drinks from strangers. It could be argued that much of the responsibility to ensure SGBV does not occur is left to women, with a near absence of responsibility expected from men.

Discussing sex with the adult women in my family would be considered a sin. Bringing up one's sexual experiences is not an easy topic for the conservative women in my family. What I have been taught are the ways to be a woman of good moral reputation in society. The women in my family believe that sex before marriage welcomes scandal and disgrace and brings shame on the

family name. Considering this, I knew the difficulty I would face in opening up about being raped.

### 4.3 The conversations we should have had

This section of the chapter is dedicated to the conversations I never had and still hope to have with those impacted by my experience. The group of sculptural assemblages interpreted herein appear to be in conversation with each other as there is often a pairing of two forms alongside each other. I reflect on how viewers encounter works about my familial relationships that have come under strain since my experience of rape, of my connection to my rapist and confrontations with self through the handling of the knotted band in each work. In addition, I provide an expansion on the idea of the knotted band that functions as an aesthetic tool to tie these relationships together and how they can be pulled apart.



Figure 24: Caz Peffer, *Mama, I'm not safe*, 2022  
Used chairs & pantyhose,  
4650 x 79 x 40 cm.

The work, *Mama, I'm not safe*, 2022 (Figure 24) comes as a life-size extension of the wire maquettes made in *Foul play in the flirt game* series (Figure 22). However, upon the substitution of the wire legs with the hollow steel chairs taken from my aunt's kitchen, the dialogue I intended to portray between my rapist and I changed into a discussion I had with my aunt. The work *Mama, I am not safe* interprets a difficult conversation shared between my aunt and I, as I opened up about being raped by a friend. My aunt responded to this announcement by asking



*“wat het jy daar gesoek, ons het jou nie soe geleer nie”*. She asked me why I was there in the first place and that she had not raised me to be in this position. This response threw me off-guard because I had hoped that instead she would comfort and support me.

In the artwork, I substitute my aunt and I with chairs taken from her kitchen. I would often play with these chairs when my friends and cousins were not around. The chair representing my aunt appears whole while mine is broken at the seat. The chairs are bound to each other by an entanglement of knotted bands made of pantyhose. The chair representing me is the most ensnared by the knotted bands, an indication that the trauma of rape leaves one feeling trapped and tied up in the situation.

My aunt and I appear estranged from each other as reflected in the distance between the two chairs. The knotted string of pantyhose resembles barbed wire, it becomes fence-like and threatening. However, upon closer inspection the viewer finds that the hosiery is soft to the touch and poses no ultimate risk. The work speaks of crossing boundaries and the breaking of consent in sexual exchange. Most importantly, the work is an apology letter dedicated to my aunt, in which I tell her sorry for not being able to enact the lessons she had taught me to be safe as a woman in this country. She taught me ways to prevent rape and still it happened. It also communicates my initial struggle in understanding her disappointment of me in this situation. Only after the completion of the piece did I realise that the chair standing in for my aunt was also left ensnared by the knotted band of hosiery. I now realise that what she meant to say in that moment was sorry as well. Sorry, that she could not be there to protect me herself and that this news hurt her as well. She felt helpless.

When tying the knotted bands around the chairs, I noticed that the distance between the two chairs drew closer. In trying to stretch them apart, the other would react by moving inward. For every presentation of this work, I realised that the bands of pantyhose would naturally shorten overtime as well. I enjoy how the chairs remain connected by the string and how they stay facing each other, engaged in conversation. I find this to be a hopeful observation in relation to my aunt and me. It signalled an opportunity to mend our connection with each other.



Figure 25: Caz Peffer, *Tethered to my rapist*, 2022  
Pantyhose, stuffing, cement & wood,  
Measurements variable.

In the creation of *Tethered to my rapist*, 2022 (Figure 25), I share with the viewer a conversation between myself and the perpetrator. The work consists of two parts; a phallic mass that is weighted down by two irregular balls intended to crudely signify male genitalia. Latched to this erect form by a thread-like piece of hosiery is seemingly, a woman's torso. The phallic mass towers over the dismembered torso to suggest a power imbalance at play. I often equate the sculpture to a dance, the tango to be exact as it is the phallic mass in the lead role who is able to exert control over the torso.

In this work, the knotted band that bounds the two forms together is stretched apart and may easily tear. The further the two objects are pulled apart, the more likely the frail thread of hosiery may break. This thin line of tension speaks to the sexual tension shared between my rapist and me. It is a tension associated with the thrill of flirtation that once existed between us, the underlying risk of danger and ultimately, dealing with the aftermath of violation that tore our romantic bond.

The dismembered torso appears to come undone in that the treatment towards the knotted band does not seem to consume the form. There is the potential for it to break free, yet it remains latched, just as I remain tied to my perpetrator only because the psychological impact

of the experience lingers. I experience moments of relief from the burden of enduring sexual trauma at times. However, I am often still triggered by a flash of his face in my mind or another publicised report of a missing girl. It feels as though one is transported back to the moment of rape and caught in a loop.

Upon close inspection of *Tethered to my rapist*, viewers encounter a thin thread of hosiery that has snapped on one occasion before and may potentially snap again. I felt compelled to reconnect the pieces and it started forming a bulgy knot. When I am most plagued by memories of my violation, before crying I feel as though I have a knot stuck in my throat. It causes discomfort and even pain. The work addresses the difficulty in moving passed the experience of acquaintance rape and having to endure sexual trauma. In this conversation with my rapist, I confess how broken and helpless I feel trying to heal, unable to lift myself from the ground. The work also reveals the gravity of his crime through the overpowering scale of the phallic mass.

There have been many times I have had to confront myself about what occurred. Due to the fact that my body unconsciously responded to the intrusive touch of another and felt aroused, I convinced myself that I had been culpable in my own violation. Had I not processed the trauma through the making of art, I would still struggle with feelings of shame and self-loathing. I sought out to create a piece that spoke of coming to terms with the nature in which events unfolded and the importance of acceptance, so I may forgive myself and begin the process of healing. As such, the following sculpture in the series of pantyhose works deriving from the game *Mama-safe* came in response to the conversation I set out to have with myself. Upon reflection I came to view this work as another self-portrait in which I address internal conflicts with the idea of my body as an active participant in the rape and the negation of my conscious mind in the giving of consent.

The two-piece sculptural assemblage titled, *Gloryholes\_tight, warm and soft*, 2022 (Figure 26) speaks to how I was objectified and rendered to nothing but my sexual organs. The titling of this work takes its inspiration from pornography, specifically the act in which a man inserts their penis through a hole in the wall for someone on the other end to sexually gratify, usually through oral sex. The taller standing structure of this artwork presents viewers with a headless body that has a shallow vaginal opening for a neck. If viewers were to poke at this opening, they risk being harmed by the wire mesh exposed through the knotted band of pantyhose. The idea of oral sex is re-iterated in the height at which this opening rests. It sits where one's mouth would be, presenting viewers with an invitation to kiss or lick it.



Figure 26: Caz Peffer, *Gloryholes\_tight, warm and soft*, 2022  
Pantyhose, wire mesh, cement & satin fabric,  
23 x 136 x 82 cm & 54 x 28 x 55 cm.

The smaller form accompanying this work lays on the floor of the gallery. At both ends of the curved form are deep openings made from soft satin-like fabric. I intentionally chose pink hues of fabric to resemble the fleshy insides of the vagina and anus. Viewers are made aware of the feminine sensibility of the sculpture due to the materiality of the stockings and their association with women. The shades of brown are reminiscent of skin and the gaps in-between the layering of knotted bands signify points of penetration.

Viewers are encouraged to engage with this work if they feel compelled to, they may finger, fondle and fist this particular form. To this point there is a bidding to objectify the two forms. The physical manipulation of the wire mesh that constructed the form bent due to the tension from winding string around it. This tension created a body with curves. I thought the structure would appear more phallic, but it felt feminine. Both structures are tied up, subdued in place and left on display. They also appear as severed limbs, a headless body with no arms and legs, just a torso with oral, vaginal and anal openings to further allude to my identity and dignity that was stripped away in the act of rape. These forms possess a material agency towards trauma as the strips of knotted band, in how it is treated to constrain, tie up and expose gaps suggest a

wounding. The forms are forced into position with little resistance and stands as a reminder that women should stay in-check and be retold of their place in society.

This work is the visual materialisation of what it meant to have my dignity taken from me and an indication of how my personhood was violated. It is at this point in my practice that I realised how critical I had been on myself. I had not given myself the allowance for grace and self-love. Fortunately, making these artworks unlocked memories that were suppressed and that disrupted the flow of my recovery. I began to understand the feelings I once refused to accept or acknowledge about the way in which my body responded to sexual violation. I found that engaging with objects and that the treatment of materials in the production of art was not only cathartic, but it was also a practice in serenity that gave way to a sense of healing. The handling of found objects and the treatment of the knotted bands of pantyhose helped recall the traumatic memory of the acquaintance rape for me at times when words eluded me and I could not put pen to paper. Gaining access to memories previously locked away in a defensive response to trauma through the making of this body of work allowed for healing to take place.

## CONCLUSION

Personal journal entry: Sunday 12 February 2023

I could never come to terms with the conditions surrounding my experience of acquaintance rape. Trying to convince people that the nature of my violation did not fit within the stereotypical conditions of what we perceive rape to be was challenging. I could not provide evidence of rape because what I had experienced had not been violent. There were no signs of wounding left on my body to attest to my resistance during rape, instead I myself struggled to accept that the encounter of rape had felt physically pleasurable. Through my art I wanted to share with people the traumatic impact that sexual violation has had on my life and like many other victims of SGBV who have felt silenced, I aimed to give voice to the complexities in working through trauma towards a sense of healing through practice-based approaches.

Journalistic media often frames rape as a violent and erratic thing in which signs of abuse are evinced on the bodies of victims of SGBV. There is the tendency to present victims without a sense of agency, collapsing their lived experience of violation to a mere wound or even death. A battered lip cannot definitively say what it feels like to endure trauma. It fails to convey moments of triumph and when one finds oneself back at the site of hurt. In this realisation, adhering to the conception of trauma through the bodily condition of the victim oversimplifies their suffering. In addition, these journalistic media representations falsely create the impression of a hierarchal system of severity among the different types of rape listed within the National Criminal Law (Sexual and other Related Matters) Amendment Act (2007). In this study I did not try to compare how 'serious' my experience of acquaintance rape was to that of a brutal account, I simply aimed to speak on how disruptive and damaging the experience of any kind of rape is in the lives of victims.

Within the South African context there are body politics to take under consideration as well. Rape was formerly used by colonisers and the apartheid state as a strategy to subdue and control groups of people and incite the fear of black men among them. '*Die swart gevaar*' hyper-sexualised and categorised black men as the violent raper of white women. In addition, Gqola (2016:17) identified that black women were viewed as 'unrapable', which insinuates that it is permissible to rape a non-white female body. Furthermore, this implies that the black female body is not innocent or virtuous enough to protect and seek out justice for. We are

tainted and as such our experience of rape do not count. Rape is not designated to a certain racial group; it affects us all and is considered a human violation. As such, I aimed to work against these racialised rape myths associated with South Africa through the substitution of my body with found objects and hosiery in my creative work.

In addition to my own practice, I explored alternative ways through which other female contemporary artists represented sexual violation in their work. The representational studies of Diane Wolfthal (1993, 1994) served as a channel through which to understand how society viewed rape at a certain time. Wolfthal's studies provided examples of; heroic rape that made rape appear desirable, explicit rape imagery that exposed the savage nature of sexual violence through devices of shock that allowed viewers to sympathise with victims of SGBV and justice paintings that provided an account of rape through the perspective of perpetrators in their plea for sympathy. Contemporary studies of rape imagery in art such as, Mntambo's digital photograph titled, *Rape of Europa* (2009), highlighted concerns of self-rape and the misrepresentation of black women within these narratives. Skollie's print, *#Sorry not sorry* (2016) calls out perpetrators of SGBV, it asks of them to take on a sense of accountability for their actions and that a reformation within male behaviour be considered.

From explorations of Goliath's video installation, *Personal Accounts* (2014), I quickly realised that Wolfthal missed the opportunity for another category of rape imagery in art that could highlight the psychological impact of trauma endured by victims of SGBV after violation. I titled this category 'Victim accounts' and it offers a voice to the experiences of victims in cases where articulating what happened becomes near impossible. Time was spent investigating ways in which I could express the occurrence of sexual trauma through practice-based approaches. The research placed emphasis on found objects that evoke a sense of trauma and memory of rape embedded through the process of assemblage and sculpture. I removed my identity from my relation of sexual trauma and instead, substituted bodies with found objects so that the imaging of abuse would no longer stand in for the experience of trauma. Rather, it was through the handling and treatment of objects that a material evocation of sexual trauma unfolded.

The body of work I created first dealt with coming to terms with the bed as a site of sexual trauma. The bed as Bawden (2014:9) describes, discloses experiences of sexuality, recovery from injury, escape into dream states and rest during death. For me the bed was a familial space on which my parents and I would gather to watch films, that I used in art to speak of loss and grief after their passing. I would stage scenes with belongings imbued with the presence of

absent souls. It was only later in my young adult life that the bed became a space loaded with the memory of violation and as such, yet again became a material source in my creative practice. I required artistic means that the processes of assemblage and found objects could provide, that would move my creative modalities beyond the restaging of a scene.

To this, I explored artworks by different artists who generated distinctive narratives through the incorporation of beds in their work. Emin's *My bed* (1998) revealed confessions from the artist's life about her struggle with substance abuse, depression and sexual escapades through an accumulation of used pill bottles, dirty and slept-in bedsheets and used condoms and wrappers spilling onto the floor. This installation was not staged, Emin publicly put on display her private bedroom in a state that suggested it had been lived in. In the work, *Au Naturel* (1994) by Lucas, the physical form of a mattress is manipulated to sit up against a wall as though it was a couple exposed after a session of lovemaking. The mattress is accompanied by a bucket with two melons and a cucumber standing erect with a pair of oranges to substitute the male and female genitalia. The form appears human, just as the forms created for my pillow sculpture suggests a couple having sex.

Sulkowicz's mattress performance entitled, *Carry that weight* (2016), functioned as an activist piece in protest of the academic institution who ignored her plea in seeking out justice against her rapist, a fellow student at the university she attended. This work highlighted that even on an institutional level, matters of SGBV could be swept under the rug and placed emphasis on the lack of support and protective measures set up to ensure safety. The artist describes this mattress as light enough to carry, but that over time it physically weighs on her, just as she can carry the weight of trauma with her, but that it causes psychological suffering overtime. It is Katz's work, *Sand Kombers* (2016) that inspired my artistic interventions most. In her work the bed is a metaphor for land and the trauma embedded within it. Katz's method of deconstruction paved the way in which I treated my materials. The bed was broken down to its simplest of forms such as the wiring of mattress frames and removal of stuffing from pillows and I created new forms from bedsheets that did not resemble a bed.

Salcedo's *Unland: Orphan's tunic* (1997), was a great source of inspiration in the implementing of assemblage strategies towards the found object. In her practice as well as my own, the found object becomes a unique thing that holds significance of an individual life. The marks and traces of use often cannot be replicated, or mass produced. The found object is a specific entity. Salcedo identifies what her material selections will be through conducting interviews with



people who have witnessed or suffered from political violence. It was upon encountering a young girl who wore dresses that her deceased mother had sewn for her that the artist included it in the juxtaposition of an elongated dining table. The table stood in for the family she had lost, and the dress was painstakingly sewn into the wooden surface of the table with human hair. The work spoke of a child's experience of suffering.

During studio practice I engaged with the objects in a manner which could help recall the traumatic memory of acquaintance rape for me, just as Salcedo used clues from her interviews with people to identify materials to use and how to use them in her work. Quite literally, by sleeping or masturbating in these bedsheets or wearing pairs of stockings and playing a game of *Mama-safe*, I developed my own visual language of trauma for viewers to access. There was a corporeal investment with materials that I solicited during the making of work, one in which my bodily interventions served as a mark-making tool. Thus, viewers could access traumatic memories of rape embedded in sculptural assemblages through compositions made from the discolouration of drool, the smell of genital fluids, sounds of breath and moans as well as the sight of pubic hair.

The viewers' own personal affiliation and experiences with objects in the exhibition alongside artwork titles could complete the narrative of sexual violation I aimed to share. Much of this relied on the curation of the exhibition as well. Certain works were floor-based to keep to the conception of a bed as reclined and something to lay on, it also purposefully forced viewers to look down on situations of rape presented through sculptural forms. Strategies such as having viewers watch a short masturbation clip on a used cell phone with a cracked screen and greasy fingerprints as well as hearing sound emanate from headsets shifts the register in which the video is received than that of having it projected large scale on a wall to include a larger audience. Isolating this moment and giving only one viewer at a time access to the content attributed a level of privacy to the work in which the viewer intrudes on someone's private property. *Gloryholes\_tight, warm & soft* (2022) specifically presented viewers with the opportunity to engage with the work. This participatory element invited actions of fondling, licking, fisting and smelling of the sculptural assemblage for them to access traumatic memory.

At the exhibition, *Muffled violations* held on 23 September 2022, a spectator had asked me whether the wall mounted bed, *I didn't rape you, we fucked* (2022) spoke of someone falsely accused of rape. I was baffled at first and told them that I had titled the work directly quoted from a statement my rapist had made with the purpose of including me in the act of my own

rape. I had not realised that the piece was capable of broadening conversations needed to be had about SGBV. It became clearer to me that the exhibition presented viewers with the opportunity to encounter affects of sexual trauma evoked through objects for them to potentially empathise with victims of SGBV. By doing this, viewers could reconfigure what they once perceived rape to be. The body of work also provided an alternative narrative of rape that often went undocumented within a South African context of pervasive SGBV.

If there are two significant revelations that struck me from my time in the studio, it would be that as I prepared my pantyhose for use, I realised that when cutting strips of it, it created a hairy, dust-like residue on my hands. This dirt sensation often compelled me to wash my hands. The same can be said for how I viewed my body as tainted, used and filthy. I would scrub my skin harshly in attempt to wash off the shame associated with rape that I felt. I desperately wanted to feel untouched by my trauma. In conclusion, I also noticed that cutting into one or two strips of hosiery at a time came with ease. However, whenever I stacked strips of pantyhose into the palm of my hand, cutting through the bulk of strips was near impossible. This highlighted how important it is to have a support structure helping one through the process of healing. That when left alone to struggle with sexual trauma, you leave yourself vulnerable and susceptible to violation again. This revelation placed emphasis on the importance of standing together as a collective in support of victims of SGBV. I only hope that my work creates an awareness of the psychological impact of rape on victims, that one is able to share the endurance of trauma without having to evince physical signs of wounding for people to believe a victim's narrative and that it is important to seek out creative ways to document and reflect on these experiences.

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